

GENDER PREFERENCE IN CHILD BEARING AS PERCEIVED BY WORKERS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to study the gender preference in child bearing as perceived from the perspective of workers in Ilorin South Local Government Area of Kwara State. The research instrument has a self-designed questionnaire named Gender preference questionnaire (GPQ). This was used to gather data from 100 respondents among the workers in the Local Government. In analyzing the data, frequency counts, descriptive analysis, Chi-square statistics were employed. The significant level of making decision was the α level of 0.05. The Chi-square analysis confirmed that gender preference is independent on religion, educational level and age, that is religion, educational level and age does not determine gender preference among workers in Ilorin south local government area. This means that gender preference is based on individual mentality irrespective of the religion, educational level and age. Seminars, conference and workshops should be organized periodically for adult members of the society to enlighten them that all gender are important and can equally perform in the family, societal growth and development. There should be cooperation among couples especially when their particular sex preference is not met.

Key words: *Gender, Preference, Child Bearing, Societal growth and Development, Perception.*

Introduction

In view of the serious general concern on the dangers inherent in gender preference in the country (Nigeria), an attempt to discuss issues relating to gender equality, (one of the eight (8) millennium Development Goals) in all sectors of Nigeria economy becomes pertinent and desirable.

The bulk of the literature on gender preferences deals with less developed countries, where mainly the desire for a balanced number of daughters and sons (or at least one child of each sex) and a preference for sons (often together with a balance preference) is observed. For instance, Arnold [6] provides a detailed study of 44 countries with Demographic and Health Surveys in the period from 1986 to 1995.

He finds son preference in a range of different countries, demonstrating that such preferences do not emerge from a single set of historical and cultural experiences. While the Southeast Asian nations do not show any consistent gender preference, the Caribbean is the only region studied by Arnold, where a prevalent preference for daughters has been found. In general, however, he argues that the effect of gender preferences on fertility and family planning is not very strong.

Parents' gender preferences for children are embedded in cultural and religious traditions and community norms, shaping individual attitudes and behavior. Children of a particular sex are often desired in order to provide certain utilities or to minimize financial or psychological costs [37]. In traditional societies, male offspring are presumed to have greater economic net utility than daughters, since they provide assistance in agriculture, as well as a primitive social security system.

In some situations, however, daughters are thought to be more reliable in providing old age assistance, particularly emotional support. They are also frequently desired in order to help with household tasks or to care for younger children. Sons, on the other hand, quite often fill sex-specific religious roles and insure kinship continuity in patrilineal societies. There is some

evidence that the desire for additional children (if there is any at all) is curtailed once the minimum number of surviving male children is achieved [37]. However, even in societies with pervasive son preference, many families consider it important to have at least one daughter among their children [1].

In Nigeria, the wave of gender preference is rising in a geometrical progression as can be seen in the rising agitation of the female members of the societies. Female "protest" is seen in the birth of several gender sensitive organization e.g Association of female lawyers, Christian Association of Nigeria women wing (CANWOW), National Association of women in Academics Association (NAWACS), Federation of Nigeria Muslim women association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Federation of women Lawyers (FWL). [2] in his study of the preference for male children in Nigeria society found that the systemic blood pressure of pregnant mother with only female children was significantly higher when compared with those that have male children.

Also, [30] in a study of Ekiti Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria found that spouses preferred having sons to daughters because of the continuity of family name. Even, the mother of only female children feels disappointed while the man becomes the more aggressive. He further observed that this problem causes a lot of conflict in family; as spouses may want to commit adultery to make up for the loss and to please relations or spouse. [2] and [30] revealed that there is strong preference for male children in Nigeria and other parts of the world. It seems, naturally, that women are being put down. This perhaps is the reason behind the agitation of liberation, emancipation, and equality with the male folk by the women.

The marriage system in Nigeria has contributed to gender preference. For instance, when a lady is married, she takes on the husband's name, culture and religion in the light of this practice, most couples would want to have male children inherit the father's name and business if all is equal.

Gender preferences for children in less developed countries have been a concern to many scholars and policy makers because of their potential negative social and demographic consequences. For example, pronounced gender preferences can lead to sex-selective abortions and hence skewed sex ratios at birth. Such instances have been documented in countries like China and South Korea where a strong son preference is responsible for abnormally masculine sex ratios (see for example, [18]). Gender preferences, especially son preference, can also result in sex differentials in infant and child mortality. Since female children are biologically less vulnerable than males [35], female children typically have lower mortality rates than male children. Nonetheless, female infant/child mortality rates exceed male infant/child mortality in some societies suggesting that discriminatory practices by adults favoring boys over girls may be taking place ([34];[36]). A related negative consequence arises from parental gender bias in the provision of basic care such as breastfeeding, nutrition, immunizations, medical treatment, and schooling. Therefore, although such gender bias may not go as far as leading to infanticide, gender preference may still be related to the health and well-being of children more generally. The implication of persistent gender preference in the context of transitioning countries experiencing rapid fertility decline has also attracted attention. It has been debated whether son preference in countries where fertility rates are falling will eventually prevent further decline as couples will continue to have additional children until they bear a child of the preferred sex. In this case, at the individual level, gender preference is associated with parity progression and contraceptive uptake; and at the aggregate level, it has implications for population growth. Alternatively, pervasive gender preference in the context of rapid fertility decline may lead to an intensification of gender preference because couples need to ensure they bear a child of the desired sex (or a certain combination of the sexes) within a smaller family size. This results in an intensified gender bias which increases a demand for sex-screening technologies but may not necessarily be a barrier to reducing fertility.

The issue of gender preferences for children may also have social and demographic implications in developed and developing countries with low levels of fertility. Countries with strong sex

preference coupled with strict fertility regulations (e.g. China's One Child Policy) have encountered an issue of imbalanced sex ratios at birth ([12]; [20]). Therefore, an emergence of skewed sex ratios at birth is a likely scenario if a specific sex preference is pronounced in a society with low fertility. In the context of very low fertility where most women who have children have only one child, it may become more critical for their first or only child to be of the sex they desire. Since today's reproductive technologies can hypothetically give parents the ability to control the sex of their offspring, individuals with a specific sex preference may turn to such technologies to ensure that the sex of a child (or sex composition of children) is of their choice. If a certain sex preference persists in these countries and is acted on, it can lead to an imbalance in the sex ratio of the population. This will raise further issues such as gender imbalance in the marriage market with potential ramifications for future fertility, and in the labor market requiring a reorganization of traditionally predominantly female sectors of the economy. Thus, gender preferences for children in low fertility countries need to be addressed not only for their bioethical implications but also for their potential demographic and socioeconomic consequences.

Most prior research on gender preferences for children have studied the extent of gender preference through observable behavior measures such as the practice of sex-selective abortions, imbalance in sex ratios, sex differentials in infant/child mortality, and gender disparity in the health and well-being of children. Studies have also examined gender preference in terms of parity progression, and the contraceptive use of women with certain sex compositions of surviving children.

[2] Studied the preference for male children in the Nigerian society and found that the systematic blood pressure of pregnant mothers with only female children was significantly higher when compared to those with only male children.

In terms of individual characteristics, there are several socioeconomic variables that may influence individuals' gender preferences for children. One of the most important socioeconomic variables is education. As emphasized in the wealth-flows theory, mass education serves to reverse the wealth-flow from child-to-parent to parent-to-child because it alters children's roles [13]. In addition, mass education exposes people to new values including egalitarian values and the notion of Westernized nuclear families. Therefore, exposure to Western values promoted through education may modify gender preferences for children. In other words, individuals who have had schooling may have egalitarian values, hence may not have strong preferences for children of one gender.

Changes accompanying urbanization and industrialization also have implications for gender preferences for children. In agrarian societies, intergenerational transfer of land is critical, thus land inheritance norms may affect perceptions of the relative importance of sons and daughters. In some societies, land is passed on only to sons regardless of inheritance laws. In extreme situations such as in strictly patrilineal societies, wives are not considered as members of the family for land inheritance purposes, and daughters of the deceased cannot inherit any land [11]. Under these circumstances, sons may be more highly valued than daughters. For example, it has been reported that in rural Kenya, women want sons because women are granted access to land only through male children when they become widows [25].

However, gender preferences may be alleviated with urbanization and industrialization. Since urbanites engage in non-agricultural labor, intergenerational transfer of property such as land may be a less significant issue. Therefore, urban residents and individuals in the non-agricultural labor force may be less likely to have gender preferences for children, especially son preference. According to the new home economics model, individuals who are wealthier and whose opportunity costs are higher (especially women in the labor force) desire higher quality children, and would therefore prefer the sex of the child that brings relatively more important qualities. It is conceivable that wealthier couples may have less preference for sons while less wealthy

families desire sons. Among couples who are already well-off, having a son that brings financial help to the family may not be as important. On the other hand, couples who are less well-off may have high hopes for a son for their economic returns. Also, employed women may perceive that their opportunity costs for raising a daughter are lower than for raising a son. Since daughters are expected to provide help with household chores, women may not require as much time off from employment to perform household duties if they are raising daughters. Additionally, "companionship" for psychological gratification may be what wealthier employed women want most from a child since they have the means to acquire everything else (i.e. goods and services). Hence, wealthy individuals and employed women are less likely to have son preference. Employed women may in fact have a preference for a daughter.

In India, there is a decrease in son preference attitudes with the modernizing influence of education and urbanization as well as some evidence for a decline in son preference with the rise in wealth and wage employment of women [9]. Similarly, in rural India, there was a reduction in son preference effects on contraception and fertility with increasing levels of women's education and household economic conditions [7]. In another study of rural India, women's education, especially at secondary and higher levels, was consistently associated with weaker son preference regardless of family size [32]. However, in the same study of rural India, wealth and women's employment were not significantly related to son preference once contextual cultural variables such as religion and marriage customs were controlled for [32]. In Nepal, another south Asian country, women's educational level was associated with stopping behavior after the birth of a boy [27].

Education and wealth do not always produce the same effects in South Asia, however. [14] found that in Panjab, a northwestern state of India, women's education was associated with reduced child mortality but stronger discrimination against higher birth order girls. The author attributes this unconventional finding to the fact that educated women are reducing their family size but are still pressured to have at least one or two sons while having fewer daughters. Moreover, educated women are better equipped to manipulate their completed family size and sex composition of children. Also, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu (India), contrary to conventional expectation, couples that are socially or economically well-off were more conscious about having sons [8]. There is a narrowing of class differentials in terms of worsening sex ratios at birth and sex ratios of child mortality which appears to be, as the author puts it, "occurring not because the better-off are reverting to more egalitarian behavior, but because the poorest groups are now imitating those better off than themselves"[8].

The female folk should accept the stance of [30] who opined that women are an indispensable force to be reckoned with in any society, also [15] who noted that in terms of national developmental needs, woman have remained invisible, the case of Thailand as reported by yoddumnernattig and cited by [3] reveals that; parents regard education of their children as paramount, and there is no difference in educating girls and boys in fact daughters receive preference for advanced studies because: It furnished them with jobs that guarantee regular salary, Girls are expected to support their ageing parents and Daughter's education represents her inheritance.

In a comparative analysis of gender preferences in 17 European countries, using data from family and fertility surveys (FFS) collected in the 1990s; [21] found that despite detectable cross-national heterogeneity, there is a strong tendency towards a preference for a mixed sex composition (if any preference is found at all.). [23] Observed that as societies develop, male preference if present should decline and female should be treated increasingly more equal. But this study aimed at gender preference in child bearing in a local government area in kwara state, Nigeria. Considering three variables, namely: education, religion and age. How they have effect on gender preference in child bearing so as to generalized it, in the state.

Statement of the problem

The problem posed in this study and to be researched on is the perception of workers in the study area, of gender preference in child bearing. To investigate workers perception base religion, educational qualification and age group. Also to suggest possible ways by which gender preference and bias could be discouraged.

Research Questions

This research work tends to provide answer to the following questions:

- i. Does workers perception of gender preference independent on their religion?
- ii. Does workers perception of gender preference in child bearing independent on the basis of educational qualification?
- iii. Does workers perception of gender preference in child bearing independent on the basis of age?

Methodology

Research Design

The research design for this study is descriptive survey design. The research in non – experimental and therefore variables were not manipulated. This makes descriptive survey research design suitable for this study. This design also accommodates generalization of findings of the study upon the target population from which only a representative sample was actually studied.

Target population and Sample

The research respondents for this study were the civil servants in Ilorin south Local Government, Kwara state, Nigeria. A total of 100 workers were drawn from various departments of the local Government. This was selected five (5) departments in the local government. Twenty (20) respondents from each department were selected using random sampling technique.

Instrument

The research instrument was Gender Preference Questionnaire (GPQ) designed by the researchers. It has Section A with ten items dealing with profile of the respondents such as gender , age, religion, Ethnic group, marital status, type of marital union, educational qualification, Number of children ever born, sex prefer, reason for preferring a particular sex. Section B has twenty five (25) items that measured the perception about gender preference in Ilorin South local government. The respondents were asked to respond to the questions on a four point Likert. Scale of strongly agree (SA = 4), agree(A = 3), disagree(D = 2) and strongly disagree(SD = 1).

Results

Research Question 1: Does workers perception of gender preference is independent on their religion?

Table 1: Religion and gender preference

Chi – square Test			
	value	Df	Asymp. Sig.(2 sided)
Pearson Chi – Square	1.693 ^a	2	0.429
Likelihood Ratio	1.986	2	0.370
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.848	1	0.375
N of valid cases	100		
Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Sig
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.130	0.429
	Cramer's V	0.130	0.429

N of valid cases		100	
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NS = Not significant ($p > 0.05$)

Table 1 indicates that the probability of chi-square test statistics [chi-square = 1.693 is $p = 0.429$] which is greater than a level of significant of 0.05 meaning that $\alpha = 0.05$ the null hypothesis of independent cannot be rejected in favour of the alternative. The research hypothesis that gender preference is dependent on religion is not supported by this analysis. Therefore, Gender preference is independent of religion. In the above table, phi (0.130) and Cramer's V (0.130) both test the strength of association between the variables. And they show poor or weak dependability of gender preference on religion in the study area.

Research Question 2

Does workers perception of gender preference in child bearing independent on the basis of educational qualification?

Table 2: Educational level and Gender preference

Chi – square Test			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig.(2 sided)
Pearson Chi – Square	1.234 ^a	3	0.745
Likelihood Ratio	1.169	3	0.761
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.449	1	0.503
N of valid cases	72		
Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Sig
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.131	0.745
	Cramer's V	0.131	0.745
N of valid cases		72	

NS = Not significant ($p > 0.05$)

From the above table 2 the probability of Chi-Square test statistic [Chi-square = 1.234 is $p = 0.745$ which is greater than a level of significant of 0.05 therefore do not reject at $\alpha = 0.05$, hence concluded that gender preference is independent of educational level. The research hypothesis that gender preference is dependent of educational level is not supported by this analysis. The phi (0.131) and Cramer's (0.131) the two test display in the above table, explain the strength of the dependability of gender preference on educational level of the respondents which is very weak phi and Cramer's = 0.131 respectively

Research Question 3

Does workers perception of gender preference in child bearing independent on the basis of age?

Table 3:- Age and gender preference.

Chi – square Test			
	value	Df	Asymp. Sig.(2 sided)
Pearson Chi – Square	9.378 ^a	4	0.052
Likelihood Ratio	9.344	4	0.053
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.483	1	0.223
N of valid cases	100		

NS = Not significant ($p > 0.05$)

Table (3) shows that, the probability of Chi-Square test statistic [Chi-Square = 9.378 is $p = 0.052$ which is greater than a level of significant of 0.05 therefore the research hypothesis that there is no association between respondent age and gender preference are supported by this

analysis at $\alpha = 0.05$ Hence it is concluded that gender preference does not depend on the age of respondent base on the available data for this analysis

Discussion

The study revealed that the gender preference is independent of religion, that is opinion of one preferring a particular sex than the other has nothing to do with the religion, Phi and Cramer's V of 0.130 in table 1 show poor or weak dependability of gender preference on religion in the study area.

The research hypothesis that gender preference is independent on educational level is supported by this analysis, which means that level of education does not depend on preference for gender.[] because education is also likely to have an empowering effect for women. Since education allows women to explore opportunities other than traditional domestic roles, women may realize that they can attain status through opportunities other than through motherhood, especially through bearing and rearing of sons. Moreover, simply being exposed to the notion that females have other opportunities may be sufficient to change their perception of the value of daughters., Phi and Cramer's V of 0.131 in table 2 show poor or weak dependability of gender preference on education in the study area.

From table 3 the research hypothesis that there are independent between respondent age and gender preference are supported by this analysis. Hence this concludes that gender preference does not depend on the age of respondent base on the available data for this analysis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender preference is independent on religion, educational level and age, that is religion, educational level and age does not determine gender preference among workers in Ilorin south local government area. This means that gender preference is based on individual mentality irrespective of the religion, educational level and age.

The war against gender bias should not be limited to lip service. There should be action plans drawn to execute it.

Seminars, conferences, and workshops should be organized periodically for adult members of the society so as to be able to recognize the fact that all gender are important and can equally perform in the family, society growth and development. There should be co-operation among couples especially when their particular sex preference is not met. Group counseling services must be put in place among students of different gender as a way to foster co-operation, unity of purpose and understanding. The policy makers should encourage individuals on the basis of their observed abilities and not on gender configurations in terms of appointment and replacement.. Parents are fond of feeling anxious to knowing the sex of an unborn babies, this type of anxiety should not be allowed to create unnecessary tension in the family, and should not allow the over dosage of this feeling to weigh them down.

The government should regularly pay proper attention to the activities of United Nation Millennium Development Goal in the country as this will enhance the achievement of the Millennium target on gender equalities in every sector of the Nation's economy by the year 2015.

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