

Perceived influence of male child preference on the social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of male child preference on the social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government, Taraba State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population that was used for this study was the entire single and married female gender in Jalingo Local Government. The sample for the study which comprised ninety (90) females and ninety (90) female producing women making 180 respondents altogether were randomly selected from educational centres, recreational centres, as well as marketplaces within the Local Government. The instrument that was used for data collection was a self-designed instrument titled "Male Child Syndrome on Female social Adjustment Questionnaire (MCPSAQ)". Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to determine the reliability coefficient. The reliability result of .996 shows that the instrument was reliable for data collection. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings showed that male child preference negatively influences the social adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government. It was therefore recommended among others that government and non-governmental organizations should mount a serious campaign against the practice of male child syndrome using jingles, public enlightenment, and the declaration of an international day for female producing women.

Keywords: Male child, preference, social adjustment, women producing only female.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, inheritance is matrilineal and patronage plays a significant role in family life. Society thus places a high premium on male children. For example, in many parts of Alago, Tiv, Jukun lands and other tribes in Taraba, one of the ways to gain access to land are to have sizeable families consisting of a good number of sons, female children lack inheritance rights or lose the right to use land upon the death of a father, thus male children were preferred to ensure that they are not deprived of sources of livelihood (Umoh, 2013). Children, everywhere, need a specific form of positive response from parents and other attachment figures. When this need is not met satisfactorily, children may tend to report themselves to be psychosocially maladjusted. They may become stubborn in schools by initiating demonstrations and being

withdrawn and rude to constituted authorities. For these children to live worthy lives, they need to adjust socially to cope and adjust to the effect of parental sex preference. Sons' preference by families in Jalingo Local Government is a long-held culture and conditioning that has continued to make women look like second-class citizens in their communities. Families without a male child are alienated in village and community meetings where only males are recognized as bona fide members.

Female children may have adjustment problems which may be a result of the gender preference of parents. Parental sex preference could make children aggressive, depressive, lack social interaction, and effective communication. These children may be seriously affected as they may be hostile to parents and caregivers. They

could always be in a bad mood and insecure and may feel no one is concerned about them, loves or recognize them: As a result, these children may engage in ineffective social interactions and faulty communication with their parents.

It was a common scene that the biological process is linked with other processes such that a disruption in one is a disruption in all. Women who do not bear male children for their husbands in Jalingo Local Government appeared to be inflicted with violence which is of course a cultural practice in such a patriarchal environment. In such conditions, women are subjected to all forms of discrimination and ill-treatment which sometimes leaves them helpless. Because of male child preference in Jalingo, due to both cultural and socio-economic factors (Nnadi, 2013), a handful of women are filled with emotional torture both from their parents, husbands, and families of their husbands (in-laws) and even people in the community.

For a child to get adjusted to the effect of parental sex preference, she should adapt to depressive situations to adjust socially. Social adjustment is the status in which one socially complies. It could be the child's ability to maintain a good personal relationship with others without stress, depression, inferiority complex, and is neither ashamed nor unhappy. Henceforth, parental sex preference may affect social adjustment variables such as social interaction and effective communication. Social interaction takes place between one person and another which in this case is parent and child interaction. Parental sex preference may either result in good or bad interpersonal interaction between parents and children. Social unfruitful interactions in the family may make children maladjusted which may lead them to aggression. Children who are lowly preferred may not have a good interpersonal relationship with their parents and this may lead them to loneliness and despair. A good inter-personal relationship exists only when there is a fruitful and useful interaction between children and their parents. On the other hand, a faulty interaction could be amended through effective communication. For these reasons, children who are lowly preferred tend to be less emotionally stable than those who are highly preferred. All these acutely painful feelings associated with perceived rejection tend to induce children to develop a negative worldview. It is on this note that the study investigates the perceived influence of male child preference on the social adjustment of the women producing only female in Jalingo Local Government.

According to Isiugo-Abanihe (2013), the Nigerian people with very few exceptions are matrilineal and attach strong significance to a male-determined and dominated structure. On the same note, the researchers observed that male child preference has become the greatest concern of every tribe and family in rural and urban communities of Jalingo Local Government. It is observed that when the psychosocial needs of children are not satisfied by parents, they may become maladjusted and become a nuisance to society.

The male child preference in Jalingo does not only affect the female children, but also the women bearing them because in some families in Jalingo Local Government, marital stability is tied to whether the woman gives birth to a male child or not. After all, the male child is seen as the heir to the throne or one who should inherit the family properties. This lack of affection and attention could result in children being socially maladjusted. Low preferred children are denied positive responses from parents and other attachment figures. The resultant consequences are that they may become psycho-socially maladjusted. This is manifested in the affected children becoming stubborn, rude, withdrawn, initiators of demonstrations (civil unrest), and indulging in social vices. The women who cannot give their husbands male children in this cultural context do everything to please their husbands but are never pleased. The men constantly regurgitate over their lineages and how they will die without their types of blood to replace them. Sometimes the husbands traumatize their wives if they cannot give birth to male children. In some conditions, some will take in second wife third or even fourth as the case may be.

Nwobi (1997) views adjustment as the process and condition of being in harmony with the physical psychological, social, emotional, and physical environment in which individual live indicated by the absence of symptoms of stress and by the ability to maintain good personal relationships with each other. Adjustment may be defined as an adaptation that is expected to lead a child out of the effect of parental gender preference. It is measured psychologically and socially. Social adjustment may be the status in which one socially complies; it could be the child's ability to maintain a good personal relationship with others without stress, depression, inferiority complex, and is neither ashamed nor unhappy. Beginning from conception, many factors contribute to an individual's adjustment. According to Propper and Moore (2006) some individuals become happy, secure, competent, and psychologically well-adjusted but others become withdrawn, anxious, and psychologically disturbed. The quality of a child's early interaction with parents is one of the crucial predictors of later psychosocial and emotional adjustment (Booth et al., 2006; Shau and Nichols, 2006).

Research shows that childhood psychosocial illness is alarming. Davies and Cummings (2006), revealed that 20 percent of children have a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behaviour disorder. There is a plethora of empirical support for the relationship between parent behaviour towards their children and child functioning. Specifically, certain parent interaction styles or behaviours are associated with the child's present and future adjustment (Skuban *et al.*, 2006; Davies and Cummings, 2006; Beg *et al.*, 2007). This implies that highly preferred and lowly preferred children adjust positively or negatively to parental preference depending on the particular gender of the child. Positive adjustment is when children change

from dubious and maladaptive behaviours to acceptable ones, such as respect for elders, and being trustworthy. Negative adjustment is when children cope by using maladaptive and unacceptable behaviours such as drug abuse, armed robbery, alcohol intake, cultism, prostitution, and disobeying constituted authority.

The adjustment process may be the outcome of the perceived situation by the child. Parental gender preference has important implications for adjustment in childhood, for example, children who are highly preferred (received parental love, and respond to their needs) respond with prosocial behaviours and are usually perceived as more socially competent than the low preferred children. They demonstrate more positive affect and lower negative effects in social interaction than low preferred children (Beg *et al.*, 2007). On the other hand, several sources of research show that lowly preferred children respond to parental sex preference with avoidance, ambivalence, behaviour disorder, non-compliance, aggression, and confrontation (Propper and Moore, 2006). This implies that lowly preferred children tend to be aggressive, avoidant, and distant from their parents and peers as a way of adjustment. However theoretically, other source accounts for adjustment as psychological, social, economic, and health conditions.

Extensive research suggests that parental love and warmth have important implications for adjustment in children. Highly preferred children who are securely attached to their parents engage in more pro-social behaviour and are perceived as more socially competent than lowly preferred. (Shaver and Mikulincer, 2005). The preferred children demonstrate a higher positive affect and lower negative affect in social interactions. The highly preferred children are also related by their parents as more empathic and more compliant. Clark and Ladd (2000) opined that highly preferred secure children have healthier adjustments while the lowly preferred children are linked to various forms of maladjustment. They explained that the highly preferred children report a positive relationship with their parents, feel comfortable turning to them for support, have a greater sense of mastery of their worlds, and express less loneliness and depression. The conflicting literature on children's adjustment behaviour when lowly or highly preferred by parents call for continuous research.

Psycho-social adjustment is lifelong unique internal processes and reactions that occur within the individual due to psycho-social (intra-personal coping experiences, emotional competence, abilities/inabilities, interests/values/dignity, purpose, and worth in life) and social interaction (the state of coping or relating with others) within a given situation (Wikipedia, 2009). Chan *et al.* (1998), examined the psycho-social adjustment of highly and lowly preferred children. They reported that the psychosocial adjustment of children was a reflection of the difference in parenting styles as opposed to the potential influence of upheavals in family structure which may have accompanied the introduction of parental preference for children.

Wainright and Patterson (2009) found that children who reported more positive relationships with their parents had greater network centrality within the social relationship networks of the school, regardless of their parent's gender preference. They explained that it is the quality of the parenting and corresponding positive parent-child relationships as well as happiness within the parent's relationship that best determines a child's psycho-social adjustment and well-being. Crowl *et al.* (2008) viewed that parent-child relationships and psychosocial adjustment are considered to explore the indirect effects of parental gender preference. They assumed that parental sex preference does not directly affect children's relationship with their parents, peers, or their psychosocial adjustment, but rather that it may vary in certain ways as an indirect result of parental sex preference.

Gershon *et al.* (1999) are of the view that parental sex preference may not directly affect the child; however, social stigmatization that the child perceives regarding preference may harm his or her psychosocial adjustment. Hare (1994), supported that adolescents who perceived greater stigma about parental gender preference had lower levels of self-esteem. Clarke *et al.* (2004) demonstrated that children get bullied about anything and the preference of their parents provides an alternative opportunity for verbal or psychosocial bullying, often regarding their parents' preferences. Robitaille and Saint-Jacques (2009) hypothesized that preferred children are more likely to remember bullying because it is a reminder of their relationship with a minority family which may or may not lead to psychosocial adjustment.

Robitaille and Saint-Jacques (2009) argued that there is no evidence to suggest that psychosocial adjustment among the low preferred children is the same as the highly preferred children. They explained that the home environment provided for the highly preferred children is not as likely as those provided for the lowly preferred children to support and enable their psychosocial growth. Wainright and Patterson (2009) agreed with the above and added that lowly preferred children experience stigmatization, poor peer relationships, subsequent behaviour, emotional problems, and abnormal psychosocial adjustment. Wikipedia (2009) opined that lowly preferred children may be healthy psychologically and socially as highly preferred children. He observed that children from both groups of families have equally good self-esteem and feel equally accepted by their peers. Crowl *et al.* (2008) argued that there is no difference between children raised in conducive environment and those raised in a harsh home environment on measures of emotions, behaviours, and relationships with a peer. Parental acceptance-rejection (PAR) – theory coping Sub – theory asserts that only children with a sense of self-determination have internal psychosocial resources for minimizing some of the most demanding consequences of perceived preference. Such children can also cope and adjust psychosocially to the effect of parental sex

preference, (Rohner, 1980). These conflicting findings have motivated the researchers to investigate the influence of parental sex preference (lowly or highly) preferred with psychosocial adjustment on the female producing women in Jalingo Local Government, Taraba State. The trust of this study put in the question form therefore is, what is the influence of male child syndrome on the social adjustment of females and female producing women.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived influence of male child preference on the social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the perceived influence of male child preference on the social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government Taraba State, Nigeria.

Research question

What is the influence of male child preference on social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The descriptive survey design is appropriate for this study because it has the important characteristics of providing accurate information, if it is carefully and effectively used, and the subjects of the study do not have any control group where the reverse factors are tested. It is a descriptive survey because it does not require experimentation with the respondents on the topic at hand. Jalingo Local Government is located under Taraba State, Northeast Nigeria. The population that was used for this study was the entire single and married females Jalingo Local Government. A sample is a portion of the population selected for the study. The researcher adopted a systematic sampling technique in selecting the areas that partook in the study to reduce biases and to give consistency. Thus, the sample for the study comprised ninety (90) females and ninety (90) female producing women making 180 respondents altogether, who were randomly selected from educational centers, recreational centers, as well as marketplaces in each of the three Local Government areas in Jalingo Education Zone. The instrument that was used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled "Male Child Syndrome and Female Social Adjustment Questionnaire (MSFSAQ)". The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and

reviewed related literature for this study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections A and B. Section A contained information on the demographic data of the respondents while Section B covered five items from each of the research questions. On the whole, the instrument contained 30-items structured on a Likert point rating scale with response modes of Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2), and Strongly Disagree (SD=1). To establish whether the instruments measure what they ought to measure, the MSPAQ was checked and experts in the Guidance and Counselling Department, Taraba State University, Jalingo. The experts critically examined each of the items in the instrument and make comments and corrections on the scope of coverage, content relevance, ambiguity, and vagueness of expressions. The comments, corrections, and suggestions of the experts were used to modify the instruments for the study, after which the final copies were produced for administration to the sampled respondents. Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to determine the reliability coefficient. The reliability coefficient was obtained by administering 20 copies of the instrument to females and female producing women in those areas that form part of the population but are not included in sampled areas. 18 out of the 20 questionnaires were recovered. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 20 by applying Cronbach's Alpha reliability test method. The reliability result of .996 shows that the instrument is reliable for data collection. A direct delivery technique was employed in the administration of the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Research question: What is the influence of male child preference on social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government ? To answer this research question, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the instrument were used and the data collected from respondents were shown in Table 1. The Table presents the mean scores on the influence of male child syndrome on the social adjustment of women producing only females in Jalingo Local Government. The cluster mean of 2.72 shows that the majority of the respondents agree that male child preference negatively influences the social adjustment of women producing only female in Jalingo Local Government.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the influence of male child syndrome on the social adjustment of females and female producing women in Jalingo Local Government, Taraba State, Nigeria. The analysis of data revealed that

Table 1. Mean scores on the influence of male child preference on the social adjustment of women producing only female.

S/N	Item Description	N	\bar{x}	St.D	Decision
1	I am discriminated against by my husband's family because I have no male child as a symbol of recognition,	180	2.89	1.200	Accepted
2	My husband bullies me for giving birth to only female children.	180	2.39	.828	Rejected
3	My in-laws call me the mother of harlots because I have been giving birth to female children.	180	2.61	1.064	Accepted
4	My friends despise me ever since I continue to give birth to female children.	180	2.78	1.184	Accepted
5	My neighbors call me 'wicked woman' because I do give birth to female children.	180	2.72	.934	Accepted
6	I am losing my sense of reasoning because I lack a male child among my children.	180	2.83	1.017	Accepted
7	I am physically emaciating because of the emotional traumas of not bearing a male child.	180	2.72	1.047	Accepted
8	I struggle to sponsor my children in school because my husband says he has no heir to sponsor.	180	2.56	1.069	Accepted
9	I live in fear of rejection because I have been giving birth to female children	180	3.00	1.295	Accepted
10	I am denied the right to suggestions in the association I belong to because I give birth to female children only	180	2.67	1.003	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	180	2.72		Accepted

Mean: $\bar{x} > 2.50$ (Accepted); **Mean** $\bar{x} < 2.50$ (Rejected).

Source: Field Survey (2021).

the male child syndrome negatively influences the social adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government. The study revealed that most females across the ethnic nationalities in Jalingo Local Government have a high passion for male children. Women who give birth to more females than males are subjected to all kinds of sociological trauma for their failure to produce the coveted male child. Lowly preferred female children are also rejected and uncovered by the male members of the family. This result concord with Nnadi (2013), who asserts that women are subjected to all forms of discrimination and ill-treatment which sometimes leaves them helpless. Because of male child preference and due to both cultural and socio-economic factors, a handful of women are filled with emotional torture both from their parents, husbands, and families of their husbands [in-laws] and even people in the community. The finding of this study is in line with Jeffrey, and Kathleen (2010), the study found that children, regardless of sex, were self-reported to contain the highest levels of physical aggression with 38.6% of masculine and feminine children were reported to contain the least with only 1.8%. Masculine children were, however, significantly found to be the least relationally victimized of all gender roles had the most social adjustment problems and androgynous children had the least. These children were found to be the most depressed with 40.8% reporting levels of depression, and androgynous children were found to be the least with only 14.3%. Igbo and Gyong (2014), it was observed that cultural norms and values prevalent in the state contributed immensely to enhancing and sustaining male preference. This study goes in line with that of Plazas et

al., (2010) who found out that girls stand out for having higher scores on prosocial behaviors, a finding that is compatible with those of previous studies. In addition, boys have a greater number of conduct problems, which is in line with other international studies (Aláez et al., 2000; Karreman et al., 2009; Chen, 2010; Navarro-Pardo et al., 2012).

This result agrees with Abdullateef et al. (2016), the study discovers that there is a significant relationship between the understanding of religion and preference for a male child. The research also discovers that there is a significant relationship between culture and male child preference. This finding corroborates the work of Wusu and Isiugo-Abanihe (2006) who found a positive correlation ship between culture and male child preference. The finding also corroborates Edewor (2001) finding on cultural values and male child preference. Edewor (2001) found that the higher the cultural values placed on the male child, the higher the preference for the male child.

In psychosocial Adjustment and Sociometric Status education, children are increasingly concerned about their social status within their closest peer group, i.e., their group class. In addition, (LaFontana and Cillessen as cited in Abdullateef et al., 2016). based on developmental psychology studies it is known that there are differences in the social adjustment of boys and girls at these ages, and these must be taken into account. It is also known that until adolescence, gender segregation dominates the socialization of boys and girls (Percer, as cited in Abdullateef et al., 2016). The finding of this study is in line with Plazas et al. (2010) study found that there are

differences between boys and girls in terms of the degree of acceptance or rejection they receive from their peers, with boys being most represented in the rejected status category.

Conclusion

Considering the findings of this study, it was concluded that female producing women are exposed to all forms of social trauma by male chauvinists arising from son preference. The preferred female children suffer all forms of sociological maladjustment due to inadequate parental care and educational support.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that:

1. Strong teachings should be emphasized by clergymen in the various religious places of worship against the cultural beliefs that male children are more important than female ones.
2. Government and non-governmental organizations should mount a serious campaign against the practice of male child syndrome using jungles, public enlightenment, and declaration of an international day for female producing women.
3. Workshops, seminars symposiums should be organized for women in worship centers, schools/colleges, and recreational centers, as well as market places on the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of females and female producing women.
4. Group counseling therapy should be provided for all female producing women and their children to be socially adjusted.
5. The inclusion of gender equality in the school curriculum is a good development and should be strengthened to eliminate this mentality of a male-child preference in families in all ramifications.
6. Nigeria should enforce legislation that guarantees equal rights to inherit, regardless of the sex of the child as stated in the Beijing declaration and platform. This will go a long way to eliminate the male-child preference syndrome and make mothers of girl-children safe and relaxed.
7. The U.N should adopt the international Day for female producing women to sensitize the public on the need to support all female bearing women.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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