

# Parental Attitudes and Children's Perception on Gender Discrimination: Evidences from Rural Rajasthan

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## Abstract

This study aimed to make an in-depth understanding of the debilitating practice of gender discrimination and its effects on the development of girl child. Rajasthan, a State where gender related development indicators are low and discrimination and its effects on the development of girl child. Rajasthan, a State where gender related development indicators are low and gender based discrimination is very prevalent, formed the context of the study. The present study paid special attention to investigate the prevalent parental attitudes and practices on gender discrimination and how it is perceived by girls as an impact on their life. The participants of the study constitute girl children and their parents. A total of 50 girls and their parents participated in the study. Information for the study was collected through a semi structured interview schedule. Results of the study indicate that there are many spheres of gender discrimination are persistent in the study localities. 'Gendered notions' are prevalent in almost all the practices pertaining to the girl child. A higher magnitude of gender based discrimination is perceived by the girls participated in the study. The rights to development and participation are denied to a wider extent. An environment which is non-conducive for the holistic development of girls is very much persistent. The implications of the present study advocate for a grassroots level intervention with the significant role given to girls as change makers for themselves.

**Keywords:** Gender Discrimination, Practices, Attitude, Perception, Rajasthan

## Introduction

"Every child comes into this world with the message that God is not yet disappointed with man", said the great Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. But regrettably! The girl child is hated even before the birth in many cultures. The taboos are set for her in this land of *Laxmi* and *Durga*. On birth, she is either killed or exploited

(Sherwani, 1998). A girl child has never been considered an equal to male child and right from her birth she has to face a society which considers her inferior and as a liability. They are treated with contempt and deprived of the love, care, and affection which is their due (Chatterjee, 1980). The practice of gender discrimination has its root on the socialization and it indoctrinates the hierarchical stratification. This hierarchy of inequality is reinforced by norms, values, culture, caste, class, and religion. Gender discrimination begins early in life, with female infants having a lower chance of survival than male infants, owing largely to the parental neglect of female infants. The discrimination against the female continues as the child grows older - first in the form of smaller rations of food and nutrition (especially for higher-order females) and later in the form of fewer schooling opportunities relative to boys (Sharma, 2015).

*'The girl's need for education, food, love, warmth and care is underestimated and many parents consider it a sheer waste of money'* (Sherwani, 1998).

Evidence from the literature and field study shows that there are many people or parents who want girl child as a daughter but only after the son. *'Hum beti bhi chahte hai kyuki wo to ishwar ka roop hoti hai, lekin agar pahle beta ho jata hai tab hi kyuki aakhir me pidi ko to beta hi sambhalega na (yes we need daughter because she is embodiment of the God, but it is only when we have a son because any how only our son confront the future generation)'* opined by a Man (28) in a study village. It was interesting to know that this person was educated at graduation level. Aslam (2007) and Khalid and Mukhtar (2002) pointed that in rural areas families prefer to educate sons rather than their daughters due to the financial constraints. Parents have hidden the fear

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in their mind that after getting education girls will start to do interfere in household decision making that is not tolerable in patriarchal society.

Historically, a degradation in the position of female started, Sherwani (1998) quoted Manusmriti which says the girl in childhood should be live under the custody of her father, in young age under her husband and in old age, under the custody of her son. It shows that how girl child had been neglected and always considered a burden and liability both moral and economic, on parents. She is discriminated in education, clothing, nutrition, health care and general upbringing (Bhadra, 1999). Biases started from birth and girls are given secondary status in every stage (Devasia and Devasia, 1991). Parveen (2007) also says that Rural areas thought to be the root cause for gender discrimination. In another study, Aslam (2007) further elaborates that generally, parents select comparatively better schools, in context of quality, for their sons. Daughters are ignored or enrolled in the schools having lower fees and fewer facilities. Significant gender discrimination is found in health care spending for children while the households face resources scarcity (Asfaw, Klasen, Francesca & Lamanna, 2007).

Discrimination against girls begins even before her birth in the form of feticide, and the attitude of society is always negative towards girls, we see that when an elderly woman blesses a pregnant woman that “*Allah/Bhagwan putra deva*” (may God give you a son). Most parents think that they must have at least one son as a child for the name of the future generation. Pieces of evidence also show that on the birth of girl child, parents do not feel happy- a woman (32) from a study village orated that ‘*I have 5 girl children but not a single boy*’. *My parents and husband always pass taunt on me that I have bad luck with their house, although it is not my fault. So if I would have then I will be living a happy life like other do and my family also would be happy*’. This signifies the joy on the birth of son and sorrow on the daughters. On the birth of a son, the family celebrated it like function, in Rajasthan, it is called *Jamnna*, and on another side when a girl child born, even their neighbor does not know about it. This discrimination continued in the schooling, nutrition, clothes and even in getting toys (Brophy, 1977).

Girls are also known as the symbol of weakness for the family. Sons are known as guardian and symbol of strength for the family (Pruthi, Devi and Pruthi, 2001). Son is

preferred to maintain family’s surname and hire ancestral property. Strong preference for male child reflected in health care. Thus, son preference leads to low sex ratio in India (Raju 2014). Sex segregated norms are practiced among all sections of society, irrespective of class, caste, culture, and religion. Gender differentials in nutritional status are reported during infancy, with discriminatory breastfeeding and supplementation practices. Infant girls are breastfed less frequently, for a shorter duration, and over shorter periods than boys (Wyon and Gordon, 1971; Kielmann et al., 1983; Das Gupta, 1987). Pasha (2004) elaborates this in his study and says that sex selective abortions, neglect of girl children, reproductive mortality, and poor access to health care for girls and women are some basic reasons in perpetuating gender discrimination in developing countries.

Due to gender discrimination, many issues emerged like feticide, infanticide, low school enrollment, child marriage, dowry harassment and domestic violence. As per the Ministry of Statics and Programme Implementation, Government of India the sex ratio is 943 and among the states, Kerala has highest sex ratio (1084) and Daman and Diu have lowest sex ratio (618). Without making gender equality in society a nation cannot achieve its developmental goals. Gender inequality also becomes the root cause for many social evils existing in the society. World Bank (2012) also elaborates the issue and says that while equality between men and women exists in the society, the economies grow faster, poverty reduction strategies work effectively, and it becomes easier to achieve sustainable development for a nation like India.

Pieces of evidence from the studies show that Gender discrimination still existing in these rural areas, parents follows traditional attitude for their daughters. Discrimination is persistent at all the means and ends of life. Negative attitude of parents on girl child leads to the discriminatory practices and creates vulnerability for girls; they treated as the liability for parents. The present study is an attempt to understand parent’s attitude and practices on gender discrimination and how girl children in rural areas perceive it.

## Methods and Materials

Taking into consideration of the research objectives, mixed method research design was adopted in which higher weightage was given to qualitative methods.

The present study was conducted in two villages of Ajmer and one village of Jaipur districts of Rajasthan. Three of the villages were typical rural settings where people are traditionally engaged in agriculture and diary work. The total population of these villages is around 1500, 1900 and 3000 respectively. The main practicing religions in these villages are Hinduism and Islam. Only one village has people of Muslim belief and the major caste in these villages are Jat, Gurjar, Kumhar, Rajput. Facilities like water, electricity, schools, and health care is available in certain extent. Researcher adopted purposive sampling method for choosing the samples. A total of 100 samples were studied, 50 of which consists of parents of girl children and the remaining 50 forms the girls themselves. The researchers used Interview as a method for data collection where a detailed face to face interview was carried out. Each interview took around 1 hour to complete. An informed verbal consent was taken from the respondent and assured that the data will be used only for the purpose of research.

## Results

### 1. Socio-demographic Profile

This study was conducted in rural areas that largely populated by middle-class families. Majority of the respondents were Hindus. The nature of family in most of the cases was joint, this is the ideal representation of the joint family system in the region. In these areas, all facilities identified like school, public health center, road, water, etc. Data collected from girls whose age was 8-18 years and among them majority were unmarried and only one third were married. The majority of the respondents (girls) is school going children but some of the girls are uneducated. The family income of the respondents was moderate which can be considered as a standard income for living in that locality. Majority of the respondents were engaged in agriculture and diary work as their primary occupation.

### 2. Attitudes of Parents on Girl Child

#### Attitude on Marriage

The legal provisions made for preventing the child marriage is not implemented in a way it is supposed to be. This situation is very much true about the communities and region where child marriage is seen as tradition and practice. Evidences show that Child marriage is a

major issue in Rajasthan and people's attitude towards child marriage is negative in nature which could enough to promote higher incidents and prevalence of child marriage (Azeez & Poonia, 2015). It also reflected in this study that under the 18 year of age there is 28% girl have been married and it is vivid evidence of the issues of child marriage in Rajasthan. The attitude of parents in rural areas is still negative towards girl child marriage, they think that its burden upon them so as early they can they want to do it, whether girl child reaches to mature age or not.

One respondent (Female) said that *'what girl will do after education it's just wastage of time and money, if she (girl child) will stay at home or get married then she can learn house hold work and child bearing practices that will help her in whole life'*.

The majority of the population in the study area was Hindus, among Hindus and especially among Jats and Gurjars, large numbers of child marriages take place on *Akha Teez* (Akshya Tritiya), the third day of the bright fortnight of Baishakh (near the English month of May).

A 40-year-old woman narrated that *'Akshya Tritiya is an auspicious day for us, so marrying on this day is lucky for the family as well as the couple. That is why most of us do the marriage of our children on this day only'*.

As per The Hindu report (2015, April 13) in the year, 2012-13 over 14 per cent of girl child marriage occurred although its improvement from the past because in 1998-2002 family health survey data it was 65 per cent. The rate of child marriage is more in rural areas than in urban area (Lal, 2015). Lack of quality education finds out as a major reason for this social problem, especially in the context of rural Rajasthan.

#### Attitude on Household Work

The result of the study also shows that parents of girl child perceived them as a burden on them in the whole life. It is also found that the attitude of mothers also negative towards girl's education, this signifies mothers also support boys' education over the girls. Majority of parents (including mothers), who participated in the study, says that house hold work is primarily the responsibility of girls, so they have to do it first. From early morning to late night girls are busy in house hold work like cleaning the floor, bringing water from well/hand pump, washing clothes, making food & animal rearing etc. These practices

show that how girl children faced discrimination in her home only.

One school going girl narrated that *'I wake up early in morning with my mother only, then we both bring water from well that is one kilometer from my home. After water, my mother uses to go for rearing cattle and I use to prepare food and other house hold works. Around 6:30 my brother wake up and then we use to go school together'*.

Girls in rural areas perceived house hold work as their only responsibility. Most of the girls told in an interview that they made for the house hold and they love to do it, they learn it from their mothers. Many times it happens that girls do not go to school and stay home only, especially when any guests come or parents go outside, so at that time girls stay at home and do work but boys hardly stay. Discrimination also takes place in the agricultural work, in harvest season most of the girls dropped from the school just to work in the field. During interviews, most of the respondents said that only girls use to bring drinking water from the well, it's important to know that in rural Rajasthan most of the wells are dried so people have to go too far (more than one kilometer or more) for fetching the water.

A girl aged 16 opined that *'Especially in summer, we don't have drinking water in wells of the village so we need to go one or two kilometers to bring the drinking water. And you know in the summer how hot Rajasthan feels? But without water also we cannot survive so we have to go. And we are girls so who else will bring'*.

### **Attitude on Birth on Child**

On the birth of a son in family, parents use to do some kind of function (*Jaamna*) and call relatives to have food; on the other hand, if girl child born then they don't do anything even though they do not tell neighbors that we gave birth to a girl child. The result of the present study also describes that in rural areas of Rajasthan, people (educated and from well family) celebrated the birthday (cutting a cake and distributing sweets) of their son in every year but they even do not even aware about the birth date of their daughter. In this area most of the women are illiterate so they are not aware of family planning, as result people have four or more children. Son preference is also the reason for it. During field, work researcher came to know that in a family there were 6 daughters but their mother is still pregnant, it's interesting to know that

at the same time mother and her elder daughter both were pregnant. Researchers asked her about this and came to know that she needs a son to save the name of the family because daughters cannot. A study conducted in Punjab by Gupta (1987) reveals that many young women from the state do not want even a single daughter as a child; this attitude of parents reflected in the mortality rates, male mortality was higher only during the neonatal period when biological factors predominate. In this area when a girl child born, people do not even say that they give birth to a girl child, they just use to say that God gives us a burden for life time. The negative attitude towards the girl a child still exists in most of the families of rural Rajasthan. The attitude of son preferences exists in each and every stratum of the society irrespective of caste, class or religion.

One woman responded that *'There are some women in the village who do not have a single son and they have debt of four to five daughters so they are very unlucky in the society'*.

### **Attitude on Child's Education**

Education is the best investment for children's future. As a girl child of today is tomorrow's women, the girl child's education or lack of education very much affects women's life and situation. It has been well documented that when girls are educated, their self-esteem, self-confidence, and earning capacity improves and the marriage does not happen in early age. Good education also declines the infant mortality rate, malnutrition, and family size. Even though Right to Education Act was implemented in 2009, still the female illiteracy is alarmingly high in the area where the study was conducted and they constitute the bulk of the illiterate population. The primary principle in education policy of India is to bring maintain equity and equality. Lack of education of girls not only excludes them to be productive earner but it would create long lasting impact on the entire life of the women. In this area, where the study has conducted, people have a negative attitude towards the girl's education, either they don't send their daughter to school or they dropped them out from school after 5<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> standard. Evidence shows that in these three villages, about 80% girls dropped out from the school on or before the 8<sup>th</sup> standard. When researchers asked the people about this, they "responded that *our daughters don't need too much education because any how they have to engage in household work so why should we waste money on them*".

All three villages where the study was conducted do not have a secondary school, so after 8<sup>th</sup> standard (Upper primary) students have to go to other villages that is 2-3 KM far from these localities. It is found that more than 70% boys are going for secondary and senior secondary school but only 20% of girls from these villages are going. This is a significant indication that how negative attitude impacts the education of girls. One respondent opined that to reach the senior secondary school children have to cross highway road and it is too difficult for girls than boys because it involves some physical activity that is why we do not send them there for schooling. In schooling also girl child faced discrimination over the boy child, evidence from the present study shows that parents discriminate children in sending them school they use to send boys to private schools so that they can get a quality education, and send their girl child to government school where they cannot get that kind of education. From these three villages, almost all boys are going to private school but at the other side, 70% girls are going to government schools. It was surprising to know that in secondary examination always only a girl get highest marks in a study village, it shows that it doesn't matter which school you are going you just need the enthusiasm to study. But still, their parents do not care for their future.

One parent narrated that *'yes, it's good that my daughter got good marks in board examination but does it make any sense because any how they have to in-laws house and engage in household activities'*.

Lack of education among girls' leads to higher mortality rate, Gupta (1987) commented that uneducated women have experienced fifty per cent higher child mortality than the women who have the education.

### 3. Perception of Girls on being Discriminated

#### Education

It is found in the present study that girls are discriminated on the ground of education. The same was felt by many girls participated in the study.

One girl Poonam (Name changed), whose parents forced her to marry in early age, said that *'I was in good in study and I got 65% marks in 10th but my father did not give me permission for study after 10th, he forced me to marry and that time I was just 15 years old only. Now I am 17 years and bearing a child.'*

There are many examples like Poonam in this area. The society is in the era of globalization but still, in the rural area, people have this negative mentality where they perceive girls as a burden on them. Girls' perceived discrimination in the choice of schooling also, results of the present study found that 80% of boys are going to private school and at the other side only 30% of the girl child are going to private school because in Government school there is no fee. Although it is not an indicator, it shows the very discriminatory attitude of parents on children education by perceiving that private school will impart better education.

A school dropped out the girl of sixteen years said that *'What we will do after getting too much education anyhow, our parents will pressurize us to marry soon, so after that, we have to do household activities. So rather than study, for girls household work is required most'...*she further added that *...and it is difficult to read also because when we come home our parents do not tell us to study, they forced us to learn cooking so how can be a girl study in this environment.*

A girl from one of the study village had a wonderful opinion, she said *'as a girl, we have to study because if we will not give our best our parents will discontinue our schooling and with us our younger sisters also. In the case of boys, they don't discontinue their schooling even though they failed. So while studying we have to think about our other sisters also'*.

It was really a dark reality in the rural belts. If a girl does not do best then her parents do not give chance to other daughters also, on the other side, if a son failed in school so sometimes they send him a better school. It shows an open discrimination with daughter in education.

#### Household work

Data of present study also shows that girls themselves think that they must have to do household work because it's their responsibility only, not their brothers. In early age they expected to manage all domestic and school responsibilities, as result, they suffer from poor performance in the school or drop out. Most of the girls who are dropped out from the school expressed their reason is engagement in household work.

One girl narrated that *'I and my brother were going school together but before two years my father bought two goats and asked me to take care of it, it dropped me out from*

*school*'. Girls themselves think that household work is their primary responsibility and they have to manage it. This is an indication that how strong the gender norms are indoctrinated to the girls as well. Those indoctrinated notions become a threat to girls in the next generation when these young girls started rearing a girl child. A clear case of intergenerational transfer of ill-being is vivid.

### **Food & Nutrition intake**

Even though they do all work at home, they discriminated on food; they cannot eat food before their brothers. It is practiced in rural areas of Rajasthan that they prepare some special food items for children but here also parents discriminate against girls and intentionally provide it to only boys. Parents had the strong belief that boys need a higher level of nutritional intake than girls. The same sort of belief has been developed by girls too to a certain extent.

*One girl said that 'Mere ghar me khana kabhi me or kabhi meri maa banate hai. Lekin hamare ye riwaz hai ghar me khana sabse pahle aadmi hi khata h, chahe bhai ya papa. To me or maa unke khan eke baad hi khate hai (I and my mother use to make food for the family. But there is a tradition that only male members of the family can have food first, either brother or father. So I and mother usually take food after them only)'*.

### **Material Resources and Discrimination**

Present study underlines the findings of the many previous studies that parents also do discrimination in clothing if we see the number of clothes buying in one year for children so we will come to know that parents brought more clothes for sons than a daughter. It is also practiced that son can wear clothes by his choice but daughter couldn't, a daughter can only wear clothes that of parents choice. Question asked by the researchers to girls that how many dresses your parents brought for you in each year? The answer most of the girls given was they got 3-5 dresses in a year, on the other hand, their brother has given more than ten dresses at the same time.

They also said that we have fewer toys and game instruments than our brothers. During the data collection, researchers found that there are many girls who do not know about their birth date, but they knew their brother's birth date and the reason behind this is that their parents only celebrated their brother's birthday every year.

One parent said that *'TV has bad effects on girls. You can see in our village also most of the girls started wearing jeans and t-shirts, and it is not a good practice because dress shows our culture so they should wear proper traditional dress'*.

It was observed that in these three villages, most of the girls were in Salwar Kurta, Ghaghra Choli and Saadi, but very few girls were wearing jeans.

### **Religious and Cultural practices and gender discrimination**

In rural areas of Rajasthan, people are so religious or you can say they have blind faith in religion, resultantly people use to do many practices that are not in favor of girl child. Some parents force their daughter to do fast (*Choth ka vrat*), this is an example. Even though girls use to do fasting or other same practices they are not permitted to enter in the temples. We see in urban areas that married women only do this *Choth ka vrat* but in rural areas of Rajasthan, even unmarried girls forced to do this. It is believed that if they do this fast before marriage then they will find good bridegroom. In these areas, where the present study conducted, people have constructed temples on the basis of caste i.e. *Jat* people have their temple, *Rager* people have their own and likewise for others. But no temple is there where a girl or woman can go or pray independently as boys or men do, they must keep some distance from the idol. So these are some practices leading to gender discrimination found by the researcher in the field.

### **Discussion**

The essence of the study results shows that girls are victimized for a malicious treatment from their own parents. The Same result has drawn in the study conducted by T.V. Sekher and Neelamber (2010), they indicated that daughters are associated with a double loss. Firstly, a daughter leaves the natal family upon her marriage and the benefits from investments made in her upbringing accrue to the new family, thus constituting a loss for the natal family.

Researchers found in present study that the attitude of parents and the perception of girls on gender discrimination are sometimes different, we see that girls say that they don't have less power than boys other side parents think

that girls are weak. This study reveals that education of parents plays important role in gender discrimination and school dropout. The Same result was evident in (Mishra & Azeez, 2014). The perception of girls also negatives some time because during the interview some girl's responded that their brothers' education is more important than themselves. Lack of education among girls is not only deprived them of employment opportunities but also affect their quality of life. Burra (2001) pointed out that people's thinking that what girls shall do after education but they are not aware that in present time education is an integral part to survive. In another study Modi (2010) says that sometimes fixed school time not suitable for girls in rural areas especially because they use to perform household activities that time, and fear of sexual harassment also deters the parents to send their daughters to school. Parents also differentiate with girls on their health treatment; they provide treatment girls in Governmental hospitals and boys in private to good doctors. Girls have to get less and last food after her brother, son also gets some special nutrition in family mainly in the winter session. Daughters do house hold work like cleaning, cooking, water gathering, child caring and gardening etc. but the son doesn't because it is a belief that house hold work is only responsibility only females, this is a real situation of mainly rural areas. All the social issues which exist in the form of gender discrimination are mainly the outcome of the negative attitude of people and society towards girls or females. Child marriage, feticide, infanticide, son preferences, neglect in health, nutrition and education facilities all are the direct or indirect results of the stiff social mentality of the patriarchal system of society. The changes that we would like to implement and see the dimension of gender equality can be brought only through sensitizing people, educating females, run and good implementing the social policies for girls, changing the belief and traditional attitudes of people towards females and sensitizing even girls at gender aspects.

## Conclusion

The gender issue is always debated in all over the world and initiatives have been taken for making a gender equitable society. Present study inferred the attitude of parents towards their son and daughter, with evidence it is suggested that parents do care more about educating and maintaining the health of their son rather than a daughter. It is observed that this gender biasness might arise from

the sociocultural factors that the tendency for son is to support parents in old age and son as helping hands for parents. Parents have their own ways and vision towards their new born children, so that male child is welcomed with joy and functional activities, he finds his life with full freedom to develop on any sides of his capabilities and desires but on the other side, girl child welcomed with a chilled silence. Eliminating the gender biases is the biggest challenge before each society. In the 21<sup>st</sup> era, new initiatives being made in the form of programs and schemes by the government and non-government organizations but involvement needs to be enhanced.

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