

Impact of Educational Programme on Gender Differential Opinion of Rural Mothers

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Abstract

Gender roles are a learned attribute – not biological an inheritance. By age five, most girls and boys have already internalized the gender role expectation communicated to them by their families, schools and society as a whole, and these norms will influence their behaviour and development for rest of their lives. Present study was undertaken on mothers having children (3-5 years) of both sex attending anganwadi centers to study gender discrimination in their opinion/ feelings with regard to educational provision and type of occupational opportunities provided to their children. Gender discrimination was assessed by using modified Child Gender Socialization Scale on two main aspects followed by many sub-aspects on five point continuum. Each sub-aspect was scored for sons and daughters separately. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each sub-aspect. Independent sample 't' test was applied to study gender differences in mother's feelings. On the basis of pre-testing results an educational programme was planned and imparted through a series of lectures, role- plays, slogans, slide shows and discussions on these aspects. After a gap of 15 days respondents were post tested to assess the improvement in the opinion of mothers. Before imparting educational programme mothers exhibited significant differential treatment for sons and daughters in all the aspects. According to rural mothers sons are given educational experiences to prepare for earning a living and to be economically independent while daughters are given education to prepare for marriage and child rearing. Mothers had the feelings that sons should be encouraged to go to college for career & technical education. Mothers showed interest to borrow money or bank loan to provide higher study to their sons' only. With regard to choice of occupation, Girls would be preferred by mothers to work as crèche worker, beautician and nurse as the differences were highly significant, whereas boys would be encouraged to undertake the occupation of electrician, driver, carpenter, and waiter. Mothers had the feelings to prefer occupation of doctor, teacher and tailoring for both sons as well as daughters. Post –test results revealed significant improvement in mother's feelings on three sub aspects of educational provision and remarkable improvement was found in provision of occupational opportunities for sons and daughters. Study concluded that continuous education of mothers on gender socialization is an important measure to reduce gender discrimination in the society.

Keywords: Gender Discrimination, educational experiences, choice of occupation

Introduction

"Short-changing girls is not only a matter of gender discrimination; it is bad economics and bad societal policy. Experience has shown, over and over again, that investment in girls' education translate directly and quickly into better nutrition for the whole family, better health care, declining fertility, poverty reduction and better overall economic performance" **Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General.**

Gender roles are a learned attribute – not biological an inheritance. By age five, most girls and boys have already internalized the gender role expectation communicated to them by their families, schools and society as a whole, and these norms will influence their behaviour and development for rest of their lives. From the time a parent discovers the sex of their infant the assignment of gender identity and roles begins. Color coded by pink for girls and blue for boys the infant is slotted for its role in society. Once the label girl or boy is assigned, virtually everyone from parents to siblings to strangers begins treating the infant differently (Blakemore, et al., 2009). The cycle of gender influence begins with the parents and the roles they play in their children's development.

By both action and examples mothers and fathers begin shaping gender identity through socialization strategies that are consonant with traditional gender norms (Bronstein, 2006). As a part of socialization parents often use rewards and punishments to teach their daughters to be feminine with statements to girls like “you are such a good mommy with your dolls” and with references to masculinity to boys with statements like “big boys don’t cry” (Santrock, 2008).

Children also learn about gender from observing the behavior of other adults and from media portrayals. From cartoon characters to storybooks children learn about the roles females and males play in the social structure. As they grow older they also learn about gender roles from their peers. Studies have shown that peers play an important role in a child’s development as they reward and punish gender behavior. As an example, when children play in ways that a culture says is sex appropriate, they tend to be rewarded by their peer with inclusion and acceptance. Those who engage in activities those are not considered sex appropriate tend to be criticized or abandoned by their peers (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). The punishment reward system for gender appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the home, culture, with peers, and in social settings play a major role in gender identity. Discrimination against girls is often practical first within the family, and either reinforced or challenged by girls’ experiences at school and within their communities. Discrimination itself can take many forms: allocating less, sending only boys to school for allowing them to stay in school for longer etc. Other more subtle form of discrimination includes the encouragement of boys over girls in terms of their ambitions and their studies or the differential treatment of boys and girls with respect to behaviour expectation. Gender inequality is an acute and persistent problem and differential upbringing of children is common in majority, especially in developing countries. From childhood, girls are encouraged to take the traditional female roles.

Girls’ children become victims of a discrimination socialization process. In India the girl child is discriminated against right from the beginning and forced to live a life of deprivation, ill health and exploitation at different rates in various income group families. Discrimination against girls begins at and sometimes before the birth of child. Gender bias does not stop at childhood but also continue during adolescence in terms of health and education inputs, at the time of marriage, in the house of in-laws and in the process of decision making etc. In explaining why parents may tend to invest more resources in sons than in daughters, Strauss and Thomas (1995) argue that some traditional societies require sons to take care of parents in their old age, while daughters are married off into a new home. Thus, while daughters contribute their resources to their husband’s families, sons stay at home and serve as effective social security providers for their aged parents, further making sons more attractive investments.

In our society both the boys and girls perceive occupations in a sex-stereotyped fashion. The development of these occupational biases is the result of role learning process which starting at early childhood. Not only that children look to other people to understand what it means to have the label “girl” or “boy” they strive for competence in being what they think they are supposed to be because of the label. Hence the “sexual-identity” becomes more and more “sex-role identity”. For the girls it is different. At the earlier stages (3-6 years) they may show preference for masculine role in contrast with the feminine role as the children find masculine role more rewarding and stronger, but later on they adapt to feminine role for which they are rewarded. Thus, a girl’s self-concept is not what she is or she ‘should’ be, but what the society wants her to be.

Discrimination against the girl child occurs in every strata of society -rich or poor - having different forms of manifestation, but is more visible especially in poverty stricken families or in families under financial stress. Traditions have portrayed girls as less important than boys, less deserving of basic quality of life. Some of these retrograde traditions have “become so deeply internalized that they have come to stand for what is ‘right’ and ‘natural’, and the girls themselves have frequently come to endorse their own second-class status”. Such deliberate discrimination of the girl child patently violates the right to equality and the right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution of India. The confusion is made worse with societal perceptions and definitions of this period as requiring controls and restrictions. Tenenbaum and Leaper 2003 reported that the preference for male offspring stems from a Hindu belief that “a son only can continue the family line or perform funeral rites that ensure the souls’ safe passage through the purgatory.” Thus for a girl child, life is a constant fight for survival, growth and development from the time she is conceived till she attains 18 years. Therefore, keeping all these facts in mind the present study was undertaken to bring improvement in gender discrimination among mother’s feelings/ opinion with regard to educational provision and type of occupational opportunities provided to their children.

Methodology

The study was undertaken in five adopted villages of Hisar district of Haryana state under All India Coordinated Research Project .A sample of 40 pre-school children in the age group of 3-5 years was selected from two anganwadi centers of Ludas village. Mothers having children (3-5 years) of both sex attending anganwadi centers were interviewed to study gender discrimination in their opinion / feelings with regard to provision of toys, choice of occupation and educational provisions .Gender discrimination was assessed by using modified Child Gender Socialization Scale. Data were collected on five point continuum. Each sub-aspect was scored for sons and daughters separately. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each sub-aspect. Independent sample't' test was applied to study gender differences in mother's feelings\ opinion.

Intervention programme: On the basis of pre-testing results an educational programme was planned and imparted through a series of lectures, role- plays, slogans, slide shows and discussions on various aspects of gender socialization. After a gap of 15 days respondents were post tested to study the improvement in the opinion of mothers on these aspects. Independent sample't' test was applied to study gender differences in mother's feelings\opinion.

Results

Results of mother's opinions/feelings regarding various aspects are presented separately for each aspect.

➤ Educational Experience

Results of pre- testing data about purpose of educational experiences provided to sons and daughters revealed significant differences. According to rural mothers sons are given educational experiences to prepare for earning a living and to be economically independent while daughters are given education to prepare for marriage and child rearing. Mothers had the feelings that sons should be encouraged to go to college for career & technical education. Mothers showed interest in borrowing money or bank loan to provide higher studies to their sons only. The results of post- test stage (after imparting intervention) revealed significant improvement in mother's feelings on three sub aspects of educational provision. On other sub aspects i.e. earning a living, child rearing, borrow money, career education and technical education still gender discrimination was found in mother's feelings even after imparting educational programme. Which shows that long continue education is required to bring changes in strongly embedded orthodox gender feelings.

The results are in consistent with the findings of Garg and Morduch (1996) in which they examined human capital investments in the education and health of Ghanaian children. They concluded that parents prefer investing in sons rather than daughters. Kumari, et. al. (1990) also reported that the process of socialization help to perpetuate the system based gender inequality and creates a sense of inferiority among women. She found that even the well-off families do not encourage expenditure on girls' education (Shajy & Shajy, 2007). Jacobson's study (1992) also reported that gender bias brings in grossly unequal allocation of resources for girl child with regard to food, nutrition, education, health services, medical care etc. Further gender discrimination was observed in the study. Besides this negative parental attitudes toward educating daughters are a barrier to a girl's education since parents see her education as a waste of money because she will eventually live with her husbands' families. In urban areas a daughter with a higher level of education will most likely have a higher dowry expense as she will want a comparably educated husband. According to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (Thirty-ninth session) "it would be wrong to presume that the correlation between illiteracy and poverty is absolute. Much depends on the social norms and value which society places on education as well as on girls." The human right to education is "inextricably linked to other fundamental human rights" like the right to equality.

Table1: Comparison of Pre and Post-Test Mean Scores of Mother's Feelings with Regard to Educational Opportunities. N=40

Educational opportunities	Pre- testing scores		Calculated t-value	Post- testing Scores		Calculated t-value
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
Encourage to go to college	4.46	4.12	2.35*	4.46	4.21	1.82
Prepare for marriage	3.54	3.98	1.70	3.68	3.97	1.22
Earning a living	4.51	3.78	4.72*	4.51	3.95	4.00*
Child rearing	3.88	4.22	2.14*	3.85	4.21	2.33*
Economically independent	4.54	4.00	3.42*	4.53	4.42	1.85
Borrow money	4.29	3.54	3.80*	4.24	3.73	2.88*
Career education	4.22	3.76	2.81*	4.21	3.85	2.39*
Bank loan	4.07	3.49	2.70*	4.04	3.65	1.95
Technical education	4.22	3.63	3.27*	4.21	3.75	3.02*

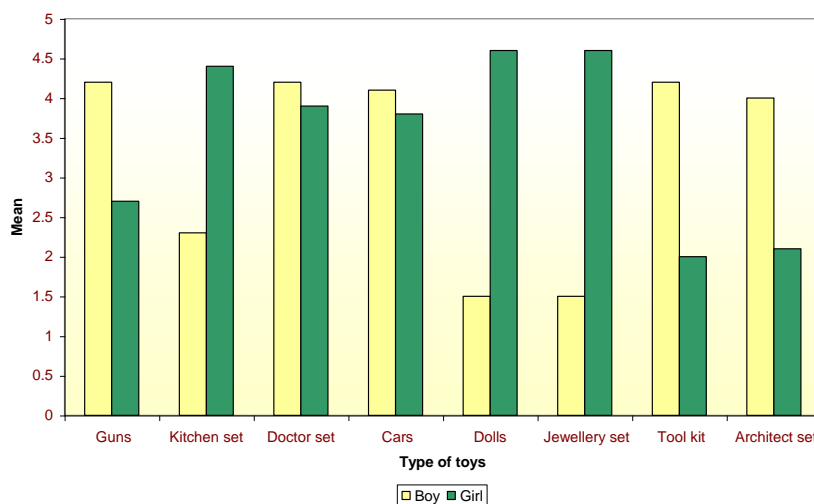
➤ Toys

Mother's opinion/feelings regarding preference of toy/play materials for sons as well as daughters revealed significant gender differences for all kind of toys at pre as well as post test stage. However, improvement was observed in provision of toys like tool kit, toy architect set and toy gun after imparting educational programme. In others i.e. toy kitchen set, dolls, and toy Jewellery set only slight improvement was observed in the feelings/opinion of mothers. Which shows that it is not so easy to bring change in such orthodox gender bias opinion and hence continue gender-sensitive teaching is required to promote changes in negative attitudes and practices towards girls. According to mothers, Kitchen set, dolls, jewellery set would be preferred more for girls whereas toy gun, tool kit, toy car and architect set would be preferred more for male siblings. The results of the study are in consistent with the findings of Gelman, Taylor and Nguyen (2004) found that parents regularly provide gender typed toys; they also convey a set of expectations and attitudes to their children. Some parents might convey their gender attitudes by stating or endorsing stereotypes. Mothers often used generic statements about gender, such as 'Girls play with dolls' or 'Boys play with trucks'. The frequent use of these generics may transmit and reinforce gender stereotypes in children.

Table 2: Comparison of Pre and Post-Test Mean Scores of Mother’s Feelings with Regard To Provision of Toys N=40

Provision of toys	Pre- testing scores		Calculated t-value	Post – testing scores		Calculated t-value
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
	Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean	
Toy guns	4.20	2.70	7.07*	4.15	3.12	5.56*
Toy Kitchen Set	2.30	4.40	11.03*	2.68	4.41	10.47*
Toy Doctor’s Set	4.20	3.90	2.80*	4.19	3.92	2.35*
Toy Cars	4.10	3.80	2.25*	4.07	3.80	2.25*
Dolls	1.50	4.60	21.55*	1.92	4.56	19.19*
Toy Jewellery Set	1.50	4.60	22.17*	1.70	4.61	21.37*
Toy tool Kit	4.20	2.00	14.72*	4.17	2.53	11.03*
Toy Architect Set	4.00	2.10	12.32*	4.02	2.63	8.63*

Fig.- Mothers feelings regarding provision of toys



➤ **occupation**

Results presented in the table 3 portray significant differences in opinion /feelings of mothers for choice of occupation for sons and daughters at pre-testing stage. Before imparting intervention, results highlighted that girls would be preferred by mothers to work as crèche worker, beautician and nurse as the differences were highly significant where as boys would be encouraged to adopt the occupation of electrician, driver, carpenter and waiter.

Table 3: Comparison of Pre and Post-Test Mean Scores of Mother's Feelings With regard to Type of Occupations n=40

Occupation	Pre- testing scores		Calculated t-value	Post-testing scores		Calculated t-value
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
	Mean	Mean		Mean	Mean	
Doctor	4.34	4.17	1.38	4.34	4.17	1.38
Engineer	4.29	3.76	3.07*	4.29	3.85	2.75*
Business	4.29	2.71	7.62*	4.21	3.02	6.05*
Teacher	4.27	4.27	0.00	4.24	4.26	0.16
Fashion model	3.12	2.27	3.50*	3.09	2.56	2.26*
Politician	3.83	3.15	2.93*	3.78	3.24	2.25*
Beautician	1.56	4.17	11.97**	1.92	4.17	10.25**
Driver	3.95	1.17	14.82**	3.85	1.17	13.48**
Creche Worker	1.76	4.32	12.02**	2.14	4.31	10.6**
Nurse	1.56	4.37	15.23**	2.04	4.36	12.17**
Police officer	4.15	3.61	3.31*	3.87	3.48	1.90*
Self employed	4.02	3.93	0.66	3.95	3.92	0.14
carpenter	4.17	1.34	15.73**	4.10	1.55	15.31**
waiter	3.68	1.10	12.13**	3.60	1.15	11.67**
Electrician	4.22	1.24	17.65**	4.20	1.26	16.73**

Mother's had the opinion that boy may be encouraged to adopt occupations required more energy and time whereas girls are encouraged to involve in light work as their main duty is house keeping. Mothers showed non-significant gender differences in choosing occupation of doctor, teacher and tailoring for sons and daughters. After imparting an intervention program, the results about the views of mothers regarding occupation of their son and daughter again revealed significant gender differences in occupational aspects viz. engineer, business, fashion model, politician, beautician, driver, crèche worker, nurse and police officer. However slight improvement was observed in these aspects as the 't' values of post –testing results were lower than pre – testing results. The results of the study are in consistent with the findings of Saroukhani (1991) found that 96 per cent of Tehran mothers who rejected female occupation believed that a women's main duty is house –keeping. The reason most stated against female occupation is the primary cause of friction between husband and wives.

Conclusion

The results of the study clearly portrait gender discrimination in rural families of Haryana state with regard to provision of educational toys and children's involvement in educational and occupational experiences. It is also clear that despite the constitutional provisions on equal legal status for the girl child and the numerous enactments that have been placed on the Statute book in pursuance of that, very little progress seems to have been made so far in making any marked dent in the situation. So there is a need to make parents aware of changed gender roles in relation to education, provision of play material and occupation. Efforts at gender equality and gender justice must start with equality for the girl child especially in educational and occupational opportunities. All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information. The findings of this study strongly reinforce the need for well focused affirmative action not merely on the part of Governmental agencies but equally importantly also on nongovernmental civil society organizations to promote changes in negative attitudes and practices towards girls by encouraging and supporting NGOs and other organizations that are engaged in such a mission. Educational programs and teaching material need to be developed that sensitize the girl child, parents, teachers and society concerning gender roles. Training programmes and materials to be developed for teachers so that their awareness is enhanced and they get better equipped to impart and formulate effective strategies for gender-sensitive teaching.

Include religious leaders in this process so that they develop and implement comprehensive policies, plans of action and programmes for the survival, protection, development and advancement of the girl child, to promote and protect full enjoyment of her human rights, and to ensure equal opportunities for girls; these plans should form an integral part of the total development process. This will not only help improve the self-image of girls but also raise their esteem in the male eyes encouraging them to work towards mutual respect and equal partnership between girls and boys.

A few pilot projects may be taken up in different parts of the country, more particularly in those states where the level of gender discrimination is more acute. It is important to initiate such projects, because however much we may bewail the failure of the constitutional and legislative support systems to provide protection to the girl child, the harsh reality is that unless change occurs in society's own centuries old gender-discriminatory cultural attitudes and biases no governmental action can succeed by it. It will be possible through the means of such projects to experiment with and test in live field conditions different approaches, in full collaboration with the community and families at large, so as to derive from the experience thereof actionable lessons on the most practical and efficacious means to alleviate these vexatious problems. These field-tested measures and policy instruments could then be replicated on a larger scale. The pilot projects should be handed over for implementation to credible NGOs who have had experience of working on issues of this nature. The projects should be of five years duration, followed by an independent evaluation of the methodologies and adopted techniques.

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