

**Exploring Gender Neutrality in Education
(A Case Study of Village Zandra in Balochistan)**

ABSTRACT

This research paper “Gender Neutrality in Education” shows local perception of parents regarding their daughters’ education. In spite of the fact that the people are aware of the importance of literacy, there is gender gap. People are still relectant to send their daughters to the schools. This study identifies the factors influencing parental attitude towards their daughters’ education. The focus of study is to find the actual reason of low participation rate of female education with reference to gender empowerment. The efforts have been made to find out the culture perception of parents regarding their daughter’s education and gender discrimination between the sons and daughters. There is no financial benefits for parents to literate their daughters. The main focus of the study is to explore the changes in perception and attitude of parents towards literacy with reference to gender. This research was conducted in Village Zandra District Ziarat. Qualitative anthropological techniques were used to collect emperical data.

KEY WORDS: gender, neutrality, subordination, discrimination, attitude, behavior

INTRODUCTION

Most of the times, 'Gender' is confused with 'sex'. 'Sex' refers to biological and physical differences between men and women in terms of physiques, genes and

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hormones. Gender, however, refers to men and women as two types of persons, and has more to do with the social and cultural construction of ideas about masculinity and femininity and the roles assigned to them. Oakley (1981)¹ refers sex as the biological division into female and male; and parallel and socially unequal division of men and women into femininity and masculinity.

The sex roles are assigned to a person on the basis of gender. Gender is the sexual classification (classification of being male or female). According to Britannica CD Deluxe Edition, (2000)² gender identity is not fixed at birth...is modified and expanded by social factors as the child matures...gender identity develops by means of parental example, social reinforcement and language. Gender is different from sex, which has to do with biological characteristics of a person, whereas gender refers to social creation of girls, boys, women and men. While talking about gender, Berg (1973)³ says, "Gender is a basic category by which the social world is organized. It is the social role of being a female or male."

So when talking of gender we are not referring only to biological differences between men and women, but also taking society and culture into account, and that how they fuse to mold these two categories i.e. male and female. Gender identity and role are based on physical characteristics in one way or the other, as Calhoun and Light in their book "Sociology", say that from the moment a baby is born, it is classified as either a girl or a boy on the basis of physical appearance. They state that biological differences are basic to the destination of male and female. According to Calhoun and Light, (1994)⁴ "Society establishes a set of cultural expectations for each gender; children are taught to conform to what their society expects of them as either a boy or a girl."

Parents in our society generally treat their sons and daughters separately. The sons are preferred over the daughters because they are considered as helping hands for their parents. Parents tend to think that whatever they spent on sons is an investment whereas spending over daughters is a waste, because they are considered as liabilities. Low-income family cannot afford enough money to educate their children, so they choose their son for higher education. The concept of not being dependent on daughter is a reason for the illiteracy among the females. "*Purdah*" is another reason. It is because they feel that their honour is at stake. Awareness about the importance of female education is not a new phenomenon. But there is gap present between male and female child in literacy.

LOCALE OF STUDY

The present research was conducted in Village Zandra, District Ziarat, in Baluchistan, Pakistan. Area wise Baluchistan is the largest province of Pakistan. It shares its

northern border with Afghanistan with major cities of Chagai, Quetta and Zhob. The western border is shared with Iran via districts Makran and Kharan. The eastern end is bounded by the Sind province, whereas the Arabian Sea lies on its south.

The Village Zandra is situated 108 km southeast of Quetta just 12 km short of Ziarat town. The village is 8,000 ft. above sea level and is surrounded by grey hills, apple orchards and Juniper forest, which is considered to be the 2nd largest in the world. Total population of Zandra according to a census carried out in 1986-87 was 2,734 residing in 120. However, according to the survey conducted by the researcher in 2007 the total population had only increased marginally to 3,234 consisting of 295 houses.

METHODS

Methodology of the current research was based upon qualitative anthropological research methods. Methodology means philosophy of the research process which includes the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research and the standards or criteria the research use for interpreting data and reaching conclusions. Whereas by “method” we simply mean the research technique or tool used to gather data. The methods used for this research include socio-economic survey, participant observation, key informant interviews, interviews, case studies and focus group discussions. For socio-economic survey 100 households were selected through simple random sample. We choose two key informants in the village on our personal judgment basis, which knew most of the people in the village and their socio-economic conditions. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the parents having sons and daughters at school going age. Target population was divided into economic classes and 50 couples were selected randomly from each class. Participant observation was used in order to get first hand and accurate information about the respondents. We participated in the daily activities of the village. In-depth interviews were conducted with the elder members of society to get detailed information. Structured Interviews were used to collect information from the parents regarding their preferences regarding their children’s education. Case studies were conducted to get a detailed presentation of data related to different events. This research was a longitudinal study. First of all a 4 months visit was conducted in 1987, then a couple of month long visits in 1990s and finally in 2007. Following are the research objectives.

- To find out the cultural perception of parents regarding to their daughter’s education.
- To find out the actual reasons for the low participation of female in education.
- To find out changes in the parental attitudes towards education due to awareness and economic development.

Research Question

What changes have been brought by the awareness and development in the gender biased attitudes?

Hypothesis

The awareness and economic development failed to bring gender neutrality in education.

Gender Neutrality

This term refers to gender-neutral environment, meaning that male and female are equal at every level. Gender equality by no means seeks elimination of biological differences in two sexes, but that the two have equal rights in productive, reproductive, economic and socio-cultural sphere, so that neither of them is dominated or controlled by the other.

Analyses

Female Subordination

It is a situation in which relationship between man and woman within a social process leads to disadvantage of woman due to her subordination to man. It can be understood as an ideological process, taking place in the realm of attitudes and values wherein people in a society ascribe lesser value to women's gender at the level of behavior and action. The process that can be used to comprehend this phenomenon is that of 'ideological praxis' given by Foucault in Culture Power and History. Foucault (1994)⁵says, "Keeping this stance in my mind I am arguing that the actions or praxis of a group of people belonging to a specific culture are a result of their ideology about the world around them, since all actions and aspects of human actions are symbolically created. Ideology is a process that creates symbols through which actions are created. The ideology and symbolic constructions of culture always create some sort of domination whether it is racial or gendered. The dominant groups in society then reify this ideology so that it becomes a way of life for people rather than a cultural construction." According to Geertz (1977)⁶every action situation is the locus of reification; and because such reification is the practical key and the ontological root of domination, every action situation is the site or negotiation for, or struggle against, domination. He says, "Reification is that process through which people appropriate their created histories as natural, through which cultural constructions are imbued with a sense of inevitable."

Thus when people in a society end up believing that women are inferior to men and that their contribution in economic and non-economic spheres is less, or they are the weaker sex capable of only biological reproduction; or when women are excluded

from certain activities or confined to certain activities defined for them through reification of ideology; it becomes obvious that the ideological praxis regarding women's inferior role has been injected into society by the dominating segment of society, in this case men. This sexist ideological praxis is reified to the extent where a subordinated position of women to men seems natural to the society's member.

Gender Discrimination

Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology (1986)⁷ defines discrimination as, "The differential treatment of persons according to their classification as members of particular categories such as race, sex, age social class etc. It is distinguished from prejudice, which is the unfavourable or discriminatory attitudes (not actions) towards persons of different categories."

Gender discrimination is not a new phenomenon. It was there, when in Arabia, before the advent of Islam, men used to bury the girl child alive. It is still thriving in this modern world when (like in India) female infanticide is being practiced. It prevailed when women were sold out in the market as slaves. It still persists when she is being trafficked and sold out for prostitution. This age-old system of inequality between man and woman has resulted in low value of a girl child. Parents always pray for a son. The situation is worse in rural areas where birth of a girl brings sadness, while birth of a boy is welcomed as well as celebrated with lots of fun fare.

The discrimination at behavioral level is actually steered by discriminatory beliefs, which were found in the village too. People have different beliefs about their sons and daughters. They wish to have a son rather than a daughter. Parents pray to have a son because he will continue the name of the family, earn money and look after his old parents. They do not celebrate daughter's birth; considering her a burden because she does not earn money. She is considered as an extra mouth to be fed in a family, regardless of the fact that she compensates her nonparticipation in the economic activity by working the whole day at home. She has to cook food, sweep and clean the house, wash clothes etc. In extra time she does embroidery, stitching etc. Even after all this hard work, she is considered as a burden.

Most of the respondents were of the view that the girls should not speak loudly and their voice should not cross the boundaries of the house. Girls were generally believed as more obedient than boys. Boys, on the other hand, were expected to be naughty and that they could speak as loud as they wanted. Nobody could correct them except their fathers and elder brothers. A number of the informants believed that girls are more responsible than boys, soft natured and weaker while boys are hard tempered. It is considered very bad in the village to seek girl's consent for her marriage. The girl who herself talks in favour or against her marriage or groom is considered *bayghairat* (shameless). Many respondents said that people don't tolerate

others talking about their daughters, sisters, wives or even mothers. It is considered as a sin for the girls to come in front of strangers without *pardah*.

A large number of respondents believed that boys are the rulers while girls have to serve their families including parents, brothers, in-laws, husband and children. Girls are expected to be experts in their household chores. About sons, most of the people said that they are important because they earn money and support family, while daughters are somebody else's property. Girls are also desired to be obedient and tolerant being concerned with honour/repute of their families. The discrimination against girls is quite obvious as they are considered as some material thing or possession, which is to be handed over to others. People get worried on the birth of a girl because she is a very big responsibility for the family as the family's honour has to be protected (referring to their chastity/virginity and so the honour of the family) and she has to be married for which a lot of money is required. Son is considered as guardian of the house. He stands for symbol of family's strength. Subsequently, they also earn money and support their family. Daughters, on the other hand, are taken as symbol of family's weakness. Sons are preferred because they bring wives and are the lineage bearers; daughter, however, goes as a wife to somebody else's house. Thus, the natives think that investing more on their girls' education is of no use for them as some other family gets the benefit. The reasons for sons' preference are summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Reasons for the Son's Preference

Why a son?	Why not a daughter?
Provides economic support and old age security.	Heavy responsibility to protect her from dangers like degradation of family's " <i>izzat</i> ".
Permanent members of the family.	Temporary members of family, as they have to leave after marriage.
Transfer of property.	Investing on them means benefiting others.
Perpetuation of lineage.	Symbol of family's weakness.

In the village, it is not only the education, but some other issues as well where discrimination against the girl child exists. In most of the cases it was the woman who showed this type of attitude. Usually it begins even before her birth, when the elderly women pray for the expecting mother, "May God gives you a son" and prevails throughout her life till death.

Birth is the time when parents welcome arrival of the newborn however in Zandra the situation is a bit discriminatory. If the baby is a male, he is welcomed with feasts,

congratulations and exchange of gifts etc., for a girl child the reaction turns as reverse. If she is the first one in the family, the parents/grand parents may not bewail her birth, but even then a depressive silence prevails and nobody dares to congratulate the family, but if she is second or third sister, the females of the family even tend to scream and cry. No father or other male member of the family was ever found reacting in this way. On such occasion, the mother also becomes victim of criticism, scolding, ill treatment, and sometimes even beaten by the mother-in-law who sometimes forces her son for second marriage to have a male child. A change in this discriminating attitude was also observed in the field. According to the tradition I did not congratulate my respondent at the birth of his daughter. He asked me why I had not congratulated him. Then I congratulated him and he offered me the sweetmeat which traditionally was distributed on the birth of a son.

Food distribution is another issue, which is always highlighted whenever discrimination against the female is discussed. Discriminatory behavior of the villagers in the distribution of food resources was observed in many cases. Although it is the girls and women who prepare the food, wash the dishes and serve the meals to the family members but it is the male members i.e. men and boys (if present in the house) who get the food first and also the best part of it. If it is a meat dish, men are served first and also the meat pieces of their choice. And when they are finished with it, the women get the left over share. Majority of the respondents admitted that (under normal circumstances) the males are served food before females. Sometimes before distributing the food, its major share is kept for men if they are not at home.

Mostly mothers serve the food and give better part, especially the meat pieces, to the son. Reason reported for that is, "Meat is not good for the girls because its effect is hot, they start menstruating at an early age and we have to arrange for their marriages early". When I asked the same from the fathers, majority of them were not aware of this phenomenon.

GENDER NEUTRALITY IN EDUCATION

Gender-neutrality meaning that male and female are equal at every level. When we talk about gender neutrality in education means equal educational opportunities for boys and girls and the parents' attitude towards their children seeks elimination of biological differences in two sexes.

Son's Preference for Education

In Zandra the parents normally prefer son as far as the education of their children is concerned. If they ever have to make a choice between son and daughter, mostly son is preferred. In 1987 a sample of 150 parents from three different classes was taken to

get some information about their preferences and again same size of sample was studied in 2007 to note the change in the opinions.

PREFERENC E	FATHERS			MOTHERS		
	LOWE R	MIDDL E	UPPE R	LOWER	MIDDL E	UPPER
Son	42	37	32	45	42	40
Daughter	03	05	10	02	03	04
Equal	05	08	08	03	05	06
TOTAL	50	50	50	50	50	50

Table 2: Preference for a Son or a Daughter in 1987

(Source: Field data)

Figure 1: Fathers' Preference

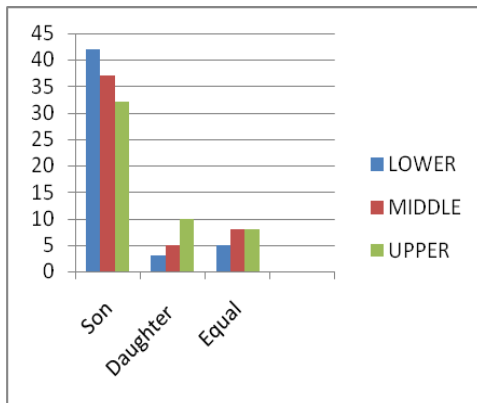


Figure 2: Mothers' Preference

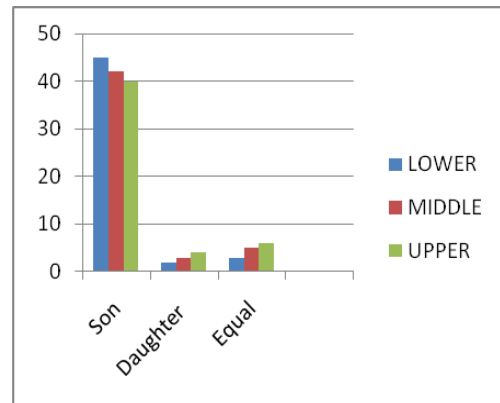


Table 3: Preference of a Son or a Daughter in 2007

PREFEREN CE	FATHERS			MOTHERS		
	LOWE R	MIDDL E	UPPE R	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
Son	27	22	20	31	28	22

E	R	E	R	R	E	R
Son	45	38	35	25	23	22
Daughter	Nil	02	03	04	05	08
Equal	05	08	12	21	22	20
TOTAL	50	50	50	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure5: Girls Opinion (1987)

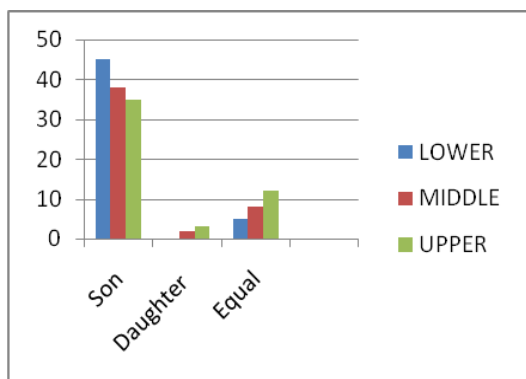
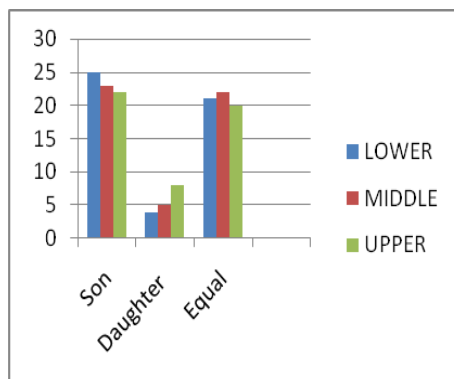


Figure6: Girls Opinion (2007)



A significant change in parents' attitude towards girls' education was observed during last two decades. In 1987, out of 150 girls 118 said that parents prefer their brothers to them. Only, 5 girls said that their parents preferred them to their brothers. While 25 of the girls said that their parents treat them equally. In 2007 only 70 girls reported that their brothers are preferred and 63 reported equality in the parents' attitude towards them. No doubt the sons are still taking the edge but the shift in the attitudes is visible.

Girls' Opinion about Brothers' Preference

A large majority of girls in the village preferred to have brothers rather than sisters because they become earning hands and protectors of the family. On the other hand the daughters have to leave their parents after the marriage. The parents have to spend huge amount of money on the occasion of their marriage and also give them gifts throughout their life so that they should be respected in their in-laws.

Table 5: Girls' Opinion about having Brother or Sister

	1987	2007

PREFERENC E	LOWE R	MIDDL E	UPPE R	LOWE R	MIDDL E	UPPE R
Brother	40	43	38	21	24	20
Sister	04	02	03	07	08	12
Equal	06	05	09	22	18	18
TOTAL	50	50	50	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure7: Girls Opinion (1987)

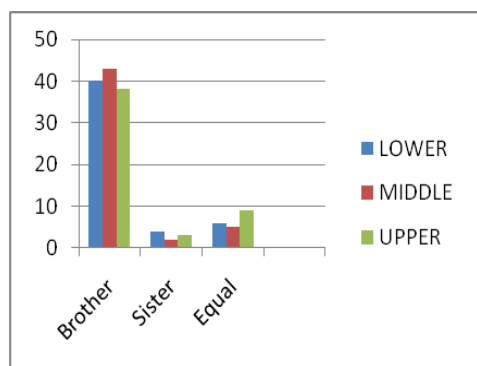
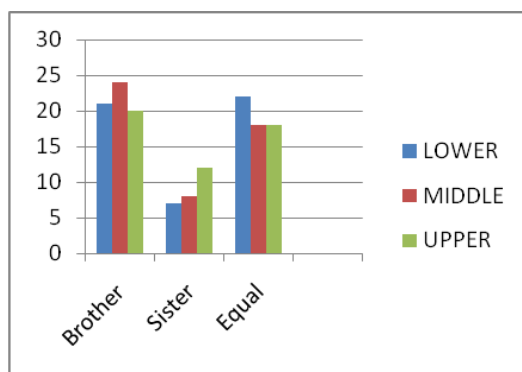


Figure8: Girls Opinion (2007)



In 1987, 121 girls out of 150 preferred for a brother whereas only 9 girls preferred to have a sister and 20 girls reported neutrality. In 2007 the trend towards equality has increased. Out of 150, 48 opted for equality which shows an increase of more than double.

In many cases, the people said that they treat both sons and daughters equally and their number has also increased during the last couple of decades. Number of the respondents who prefer sons mostly for economic reasons is still on top. They said, “We don’t have money to send our daughters to school.” Due to financial constrains we cannot continue the girls education after primary level. However, they get loans for the education of their sons. The boys can get education up to the level they want. They are always encouraged. Even boys weak in studies are pressurized to get higher education while on the other hand intelligent girls having potential to get higher education are not allowed to do so.

Case Study: A 68 years old retired clerk of Municipal Corporation Quetta told the researcher that he is matric while his wife is primary pass. They have a small piece of

agricultural land and some livestock. The old man is presently attached with the Mosque Management. They have 5 sons and 4 daughters. The father wanted at least one of his sons to become lawyers if not all. He had meager resources, but spent generously on the education of his sons. Four of his sons could not go beyond matric. However one of them got admission in Law College Quetta. The father invested each and every thing on him, and finally he became a lawyer. After completing his studies, he settled in Quetta. Today he is not sending money or material to his parents. Even he does not visit them.

Contrary to that, the old man's daughters had the talent and potential for higher studies. He never spent much on their education. His eldest daughter passed her BA examination through distance education system. She wanted to get admission in Law College but was not allowed for it. Now she is working as a teacher in the village. The next to her is also a teacher, and the third one is running a tuition center at home. All the daughters are earning and supporting their parents. On the other hand none of the sons is helping them. The sisters collectively saved some money and got one of the brothers married.

In spite of all this the old man feels proud to be father of a son who is a lawyer in Quetta, though he sends them nothing. He says that the girls have their own problems. When they are highly educated, it becomes difficult to find their match. If they are working, the worries increase because they have to be properly protected when they go out of the house. People talk about them.

CHANGES IN THE ATTITUDES

The attitudes regarding the gender discrimination in the field of education has also changed. Initially the main reason for not sending their daughters to schools was *pardah* but now more of the economic reasons were reported. Some people are still reluctant to invest on their daughters because they are not permanent members of the family and mostly they do not contribute in the household economy even if they are working. Most of the parents say that we do not have to send them for jobs so why to educate them because the males who send their females for jobs face a bad reputation in the society. Economic dependence on females was considered as shamelessness (*baygharity*). This concept was and still is a barrier for the girls in access to education but there is a notable change in it. The people who educate and allow their daughters to work have a different argument. They say that there is nothing wrong in depending economically on females because the people have been doing it since a long time. The ladies have always been working in the fields with the males which are an indirect economic contribution and the male has been enjoying it since forever. So there is no harm in sending the female to work. Above discussion makes it clear that

economy is the main feature behind all types of gender discrimination including education, food, preference, inheritance etc. More investment is made on sons believing them as permanent members of the families as well as the earning hands. As girls have to go to the other family. Delayed marriages of some educated working women were also observed, as the parents do not want to lose an earning member of the family so early as the investor wants the maximum benefit of his investment for himself not for the others.

As education enables a person to put a question, people do not give education to their daughters fearing that they would demand their right of inheritance. Here, thus, again economy plays a role in keeping the girls away from the school. Better food is served to the boys to build them stronger for working heard and earning money. So the sons are preferred in giving food for economic benefits. Economy, thus , becomes the major player in gender discrimination. The today's materialistic life has created more demand for money, increasing discrimination against women.

CONCLUSION

The trend towards education among males and females has changed during last three decades. Now the educational levels are improved as the percentages at elementary, secondary and higher secondary levels have really gone up. Similarly their attitudes towards education have also changed. Now most of the people send their daughters to schools. The elderly women were more for religious education whereas the younger ones were for the formal school education. Among the males trend was similar but the percentage towards formal education was higher. During last two decades this opinion has changed remarkably. No doubt the sons are still preferred but their attitude towards neutrality has really increased.

Pardah has been a major barrier for the girls' education since a long time. The other barriers include division of labour, male decision makers, nonparticipation in economic activities, temporary family membership, and inheritance. Parents belonging to different classes and age groups have their own reasons for not sending their daughters to schools. Young parents were more concerned for economic reasons. So with the passage of time the reasons have been shifted from *pardah* to economy which includes nonparticipation in economic activities, investment on temporary family member and the inheritance.

End Note

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- ¹ Oakley, A. (1981). *On women*. Worcester: Book plan.
- ² Britannica, C.D. (2000). Deluxe Edition, Copyright © 1994-2000 Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.
- ³ Berg, A. (1973). *The Nutrition Factor*. Washington, D. C: The Brookings Institution.
- ⁴ Calhoun, C. & Light, D. (1994). *Sociology*, Susan Keller (Ed). USA: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- ⁵ Foucault, M. (1994). *Two lectures in Culture, Power and History*. N. B. Dirks, G. Eley & S. B. Ortner (Eds.). Princeton University Press.
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