

GENDER PLAY AT EARLY CHILDHOOD IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify the gender biased attitude of parents, teachers and society at large with boys and girls during their early childhood. For this purpose Robert Stake's Countenance Model was adapted to document and report the findings in qualitative form. The study covered early childhood educational institutions in Pakistan. The sample from urban and rural areas of Pakistan was selected. Fifty parents, fifty teachers and hundred children were interviewed and observed in a natural setting. The study identified that at home girls and boys received a different attitude from their parents. Teachers usually consider that boys are more intelligent. During interviews and observations the researcher found young boys were more confident and expressed their views with ease as compared to young girls.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a country with strong cultural traditions. The girl child from her early childhood does not get the same love, equal opportunities and respect from family and society as the boy-child does. Poverty, ignorance and tradition combineto relegate the girl-child to a position of extreme subordination. The researchers found out that this phenomenon is socially created in society by parents, teachers and society at large. (Fayyaz, S. et al

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The children possess innumerable potentials, the brain is seventy five percent developed at the age of five to six years (Gardner, 1993).

Gender biases are one of the barriers in the progress and development in the world and Pakistan is no exception. The research studies indicate that gender differentiation begins very early for example by choice of parents, few girls are born and more die. Birthday practices and the care-giving of young very quickly set the stage for the ways in which children are treated during the early years, late childhood and adult hood.

Throne, Barrie (1993) a feminist wrote:

"The social construction of gender is an active and on going process. Gender categories, gender identities, gender divisions, gender based groups, gender meaning-all are produced actively and collaboratively in every day life".

Furthermore, according to the field studies of Barrie

"When children maneuver to form gender groups on the play ground or organize a kick ball game as -boys-against-the girls", they produce a sense of gender as dichotomy and opposition. When girls and boys work cooperatively on a classroom project, they actively undermine a sense of gender which is in opposition with the phrase of Candace West and Don Zimmerman "We do gender".

Bhasin(1997) says in her book that "Our dream is to have families and communities where girls and boys are given equal opportunities to flower and flourish. If many of us have this dream and we do something to make it come true,things will change."

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Therefore, it is worth spending sometime looking at the ways in which early childhood care and development setting can address the gender issue.

The over all purpose of this study was:

- To study the differences in attitude towards young girls and boys (birth to six years) in a family, in a school and in society at large.
- Its impact on the self image of young girls and boys (birth to six years)

The social environment in Pakistan begins to favors the boy child. As the girl child grows older; she internalizes this sense of inequality by continuous process of social discrimination. Then she passes it to the next generation by treating her daughters with the same biases. Neglect and discrimination against females is reflected in every sphere of life. It is evident in the educational and job opportunities available to them. Above all, it is strengthened by a legal system that on many occasions treats men and women differently. (Working Group for Women, the Aga khan University, 1999)

Khan, N. (1997) in her research paper pointed out that Human Rights asserts that 'Every one has a right to education' Despite this approximately 58% of Pakistani females aged 5 to 29 have never attended school. Only 31% females students are enrolled in primary schools and only 13.4% of students at university level are women. The gap between male and female education continue to keep away women from empowerment.

According to the SPARC report (1977) girls are hidden child laborers in Pakistan and the most exploited of the lot. In Punjab alone 9,000 girls between the ages of 5 – 14 are found on streets rag picking and working in factories. Next group consists of girls employed as domestic servants (Fayyazuddin et al 1998).

The circle of human dignity requires far greater attention to the rights of women throughout the world. We should not believe that women are inferior to men. Any discrimination between male and female children at home and in

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society is simply criminal. Rights on papers that are not protected and implemented are not legal rights at all.

To collect the data for the study Robert Stake's Countenance Model was used. The Robert Stake's Countenance Model was adapted to document and report the findings in qualitative form. This model was created in 1967 by Robert E. Stake, for the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation at the University of Illinois.

This is one of the models of evaluation to assess the relevance of curriculum. Robert gave importance to educational programs rather than educational products. He considered that judgment data and description data both are essential to the evaluation of any educational program. This model of evaluation is known as Countenance i.e. to study the appearance and expression of any program.

In preparing evaluation report it can be helpful to distinguish between antecedent, transaction and outcome data. An antecedent is any condition existing prior to teaching and learning which may relate to outcomes. The status of a student prior to his lesson, e.g. his aptitude, previous experience, interest, and willingness, is a complex antecedent. Transactions are the countless encounters of students with teacher, the succession of engagements which comprise the process of education. During a transaction we can identify certain outcomes which are feedback antecedents for subsequent learning.

The categories serve to remind us to be exhaustive in our data collection. During the study as evaluator the researcher tried to find out the contingencies i.e. possibilities to find out the antecedent, transaction and outcomes of the program. As well as this study gave an opportunity to find out congruence i.e. harmony among antecedent, transaction and outcome of preschool programs in Pakistan.

The scope of the study covered the children of the age from 3-6 years. They were from urban and rural areas of Pakistan. For selecting families and

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teachers for the study a purposive sampling method was used. It enabled the researcher to find who could provide required base line data for the study. The data gathering instruments developed were in the form of checklists. Fifty parents, fifty teachers and hundred children were interviewed and observed in a natural setting. To study and evaluate the gender issues, hundred children across the country were interviewed and observed in the field. They belonged to different urban and rural areas of Pakistan. Among them fifty were boys and fifty were girls. Beside that fifty parents were interviewed from rural and urban areas of Pakistan. They were also observed in their home settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Parental role in creating gender differences:

To evaluate the role of parents in creating gender differences at home, fifty parents were interviewed from urban and rural areas of Pakistan. Parents were also observed in their home setting. Most of the mothers reported that the birth of a boy child was a very pleasant experience to them, because thier husband and other familymembers received the boy child with great love and affection. Where as, the birth of a girl child is not much pleasant. Mothers have demonstrated unpleasant feelings on the birth of a girl child. Especially, in rural areas mothers cried and showed bitter feelings after the birth of a girl child. The mothers in rural areas expressed that they considered a girl child equally good as a boy child but their husband and their family showed a positive attitude towards the birth of a boy child therefore, they felt an urge to have a son.

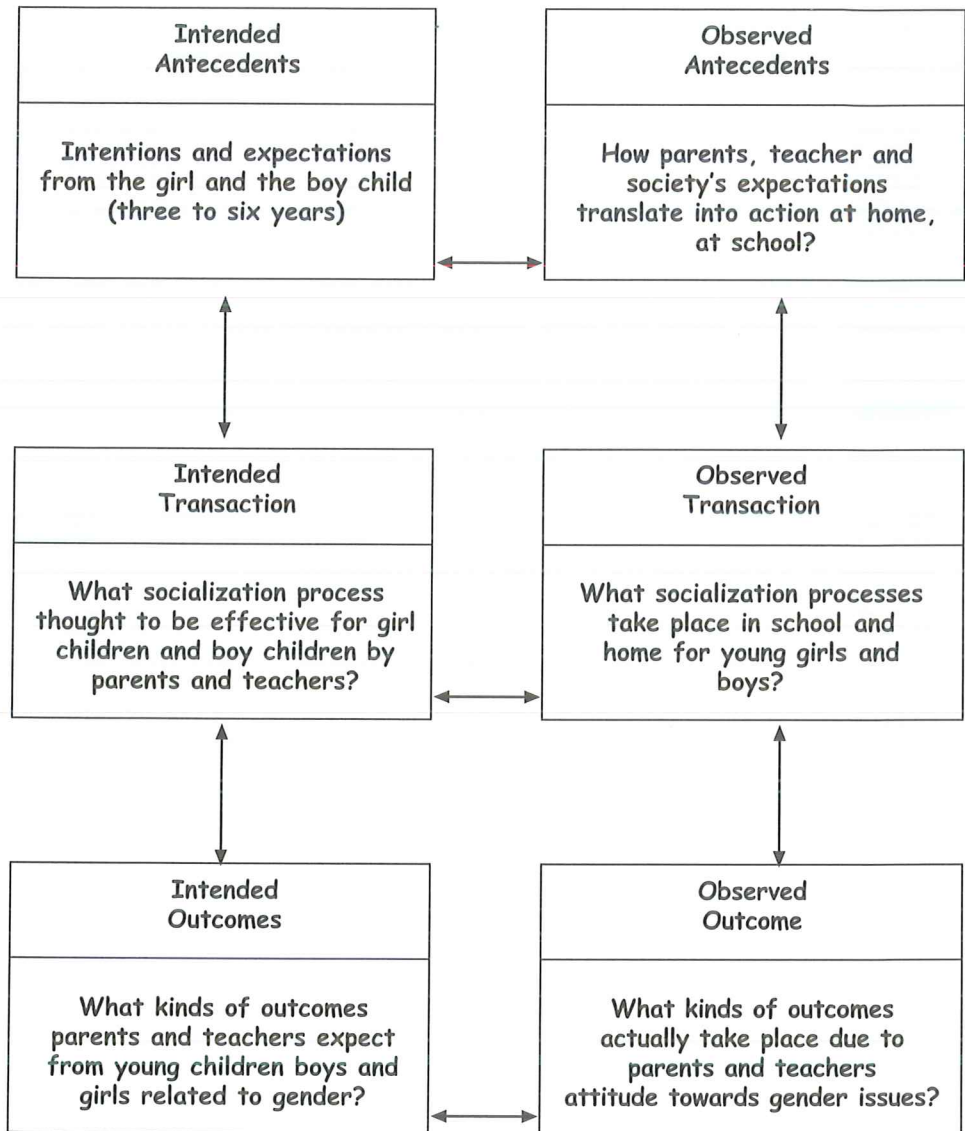
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An interesting case study was recorded in a remote area of Chitral-Susum from a mother:

“I have six children, four boys and two girls. We have limited financial resources; we can not afford to teach all the children in school. Therefore our four sons are studying in school. The eldest daughter helps me in domestic work. My youngest child is also a daughter. She is five years old and too young to go to school. Daughters after all are going to their husband’s home and the sons are the backbone of their parents”.

Countenance Model of Evaluation

Applied to Evaluation of Gender Play at Early Childhood



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The aforementioned case study indicates that in Pakistan especially in rural areas, gender biases still prevail in our society. Parents still think that sons are their future helpers and not daughters. During interviews, mothers in urban areas did not regret on the birth of daughters. Those mothers also reported that a girl-child is as good as boy. Through education, parents could nourish the capabilities of the children-daughter or son equally. At home, it was observed that the girls were asked to look-after their younger brothers or sisters. The young-girls were also helping their mothers in domestic work. In rural areas, the girls hardly got time to relax and play games. In urban areas, many differences were observed at home between girls and boys' daily schedule. The boys were free to enjoy any game, whereas, girls had to follow rules.

Teachers' role in creating gender differences:

The teachers' attitude towards gender due to their educational background has changed. The teachers consider that girls and boys are equally intelligent. The teachers stated that the days had gone when we used to say that only boys could become engineers and doctors. Now the girls are also taking higher education. The observation in classrooms demonstrated that teachers give equal opportunities to both boy and girl students to participate in class activities. Few teachers of arithmetic think that arithmetic is a subject for boys. Boys are clever, they can solve difficult problems. The gender differences could also be visualized in the playground, where boys were active and girls were sitting in groups and playing silently.

Games children play in school and at home

The children were also interviewed in various areas of Punjab i.e. Multan, Sarghoda and Sialkot. The children reported that their elders do not like that the girls and boys play together, so they play separately. The girls preferred to play with dolls and the boys played outside their homes (Gilidanda, Cricket etc). During observation the researcher marked differences in

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the urban and rural children as it has been marked in other areas of Pakistan. In the cities like Lahore, the girl and boy children play together and work together whereas in villages there are strong restrictions and girl children and boy children are not allowed to play together. Generally, in rural areas women's activities are mostly limited at home except at harvesting time so the girl children observe their mothers as role models, working at home which is a hidden message that girls will also work at home not outside.

Five children were selected from Thatta villages and interviewed. They reported that they do not play together. Because girls were not allowed to play outside their homes but boys could play outside. The researcher lived for a few days among the rural people of Thatta. Most of the families had more than five children. Individual attention to each child was out of the question. Liking for boy child was explicitly visible. The girl child due to all these circumstances lost her childhood.

Ten children were interviewed from Quetta; five were from Kehkashan School while the other five were from a government school. Out of ten, four were girls and six were boys. They were asked; whether in schools and at home, boys and girls play together?

The answers of these two groups were in contrast. The government school children mentioned that in schools only boys attend. They also mentioned that in school and at home they play with boys. Whereas, children of Kehkashan School reported that in school and at home, they play with other friends, i.e. girls and boys. In Baluchistani society, the researcher observed the differences in tribes. Fight is considered as the sign of bravery. Different marriage practices also make the females less important to boys. For example young girls are sold in the name of marriage. The price of a bride is fixed according to her looks, height, family, status, and the bridegroom's family pays it. These practices create a gender-biased environment. From the time of birth, a girl feels less accepted by her immediate family. These practices create a gender-biased environment.

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The children of Pamir school at Chitral had shown great interest in sports. When asked whether the girls and boys played together, the answer was in the affirmative. When the researcher observed the preschool class in Pamir School, researcher found that out of 30 children, only 5 were girls. It showed that in Pakistan and especially in rural areas, the education of young girls is not given due importance. Watching preschool girls on the playground also indicated that boys were playing cricket and girls were playing with stones (a cultural game). They were divided in to two groups.

The researcher found a marked difference between a girl and a boy child in Chitral. The girls were shy, did not answer questions (except for a few girls). Generally five-year girls wore full dupatta whereas boys were outgoing and more confident. When the same question was asked to five children of Pamir School-Chitral, they said that the girls and the boys play in separate groups because the girls and boys liked different games. Girls preferred dolls and doll games where as boys liked to play outdoor games. When the researcher asked a boy in that group, surprised he replied, "No I am not a Girl".

From early childhood, parents give different toys to young boys and young girls. Most of the girls get dolls to play with, whereas boys have cars, airplanes etc. A feminist Bhasin (1997), has defined the role of a girl and a boy in her book "What is a girl? What is a boy"?

"Instead of encouraging similarities between girls and boys, societies and cultures have been emphasizing the differences. That is why girls and boys grow up so differently and their paths are so separate. It is these inequalities that have caused a lot of tensions and conflicts between men and women".

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The children in interior Sindh Thatta, also reported that their parents asked them to play separately. A boy said very innocently; "I feel shy to play with a girl child". Overall the study of children at playground and various observations recorded indicated that in Pakistan the young girls were also prohibited to play games. They were asked to help in domestic and agricultural work, whereas boys from early childhood were free to enjoy their games and outings.

During the interview five children of Nasra Preschool- Karachi (two boys and three girls) reported that the girls and the boys play together. They especially enjoy on the terrace-while playing "house play". The children also mentioned that in the classroom they sit together. After the interview, the children were also observed in the classroom setting. It had been observed that the young girls and boys were playing together. During the play it was marked that the young boys were moving and jumping more than the young girls. Boys showed more aggressive behavior during the play. These children also reported that in school and at home they participated in all sorts of games. During Observation, the researcher had seen children engaged in group activities, group projects and even during playtime the children were together. The main reason of this gender free environment was that the teachers of Nasra School made the girls and boys sit together and they also gave group work to children without segregating girls and boys.

The overall study of the young children in Pakistan reveals that the topic of children and gender should be considered in close connection with social class, race, ethnicity and sexuality and not artificially stripped from other contexts.

Parents' and teachers' attitude towards a girl and a boy child.

Does your teacher/parent treat boys and girls equally?

To the question ten boys and ten girls reported that our teachers prefer boys. When it was asked how you say that your teacher prefers boys, they mentioned few actions and gestures of their teachers and parents such as:

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- During the class our teachers says "good" to boys.
- Our teachers asked the boys more questions.
- My mother tells me (girl child) to help my brother, but my mother never tells my brother to help me.
- At home my father and brother eat food first and then I eat food with my mother.
- My father gives his son more of everything than he gives his daughters than to me (a girl child).

Twenty children from various cities of Pakistan, nine boys and eleven girls reported that their teachers liked both boys and girls. Their parents were equally ambitious to educate both sons as well as daughters. At the same time, the teachers in the class asked the girls and boy children to sit together, play together and learn together. These environmental factors gave these children, think beyond gender. Twenty children reported an interesting dimension of gender treatment. Ten girls reported that their teachers and parents preferred boys whereas ten boys said that their parents have a soft heart for girls. Children' comments were:

S. no	Remarks by boys	Remarks by Girls
1	My mother allows my sister to help her in kitchen but not me.	My mother allows my brother to play but not me.
2	My teacher takes extra care of the girls.	My teacher always says good, to boys but rarely to girls.
3	My father kisses to my sister more than he kisses me.	My teacher asks the boys more questions than she asks the girls. My mother tells my brother to become a doctor in future but she does not say such things to me.

According to the research, in the field of gender, the attitude of parents and teachers play an important role in developing a gender attitude in girls and

boys. This attitude of parents and teachers play a role of seed in the minds of the young children. Soon their likings and dislikings change accordingly. They play those games which parents and teachers asked them to play as a girl and as a boy. The dramatic side of the whole process is that the people accept them as natural God-given gifts not imposed by their society.

Personal feelings as a boy and as a girl

To evaluate these children's attitude towards themselves and how much they have been influenced by the remarks of others i.e. family and school. They were asked: How do you feel as a boy or as a girl?

The children had given innocent answers; the cultural impact could clearly be seen,

- I like being a girl- otherwise I would have a beard (a girl)
- I like being a boy because boys are braver (girls/ boys)
- I like being a girl, I can wear beautiful clothes (a girl)
- I like being a boy because I can play cricket (a boy)
- I like being a girl because I can play with dolls (a girl)

Few young girls reported that, they wanted to be boys because, their parents like a "boy child". They observed that their parents prayed for a boy child. A child (girl) reported that she wanted to be a boy because she has seen her mother cry when she gave birth to a girl child. These general and frank remarks of fifty children clearly show that in Pakistani society, parents, grand parents and teachers through their attitudes and verbal remarks express their preferences for a boy child. In this way slowly and gradually, a girl's self-image is destroyed and she starts disliking herself. She become shy, she cannot speak in front of others and she lacks self-confidence.

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The role of toys in developing fixed roles for boys and girls

According to the research in the field of gender, society fixed the roles of the boys and girls by designing their toys and games in such a manner that those feelings and attitudes internalize in themselves. This process of gender thinking is so unconscious that in a workshop on 'Gender Sensitivity,' a whole group of women convinced that by nature a girl child likes dolls and a boy child likes guns, a helicopter etc. Most of the girls reported that they have dolls and toys related to home. Few girls in the cities have shown the toy- instruments used in hospitals. Few girls said they wear different costumes and play games. They role-play their mother, teacher and nurse. During observation the researcher marked that most of the girls in rural areas do not have any toys. They play with their girl friends, with small stones or hide and seek games etc. A father reported that:

"We can not buy toys for our children because it is not available in our market. After all it is a waste of money".

The activities of girl and boy children

When asked:As a boy/girl what activities do you like?

The fifty children gave a variety of answers. Most of the girls (especially from rural areas) reported that they loved to play outside. They wanted to go out and explore but their mothers do not allow them to play. Where as a few boys said they loved to play but at the same time they liked to work in the kitchen e.g. they like to help their mothers in cooking. Their mothers said cooking was a woman's job. Observing these children in their home setting showed that parents ask the young children at their early age to live in a stereotype manner- fixed roles for girls and fixed roles for boys. This is the reason why girls cannot progress and develop their talents the way boys can. Within the same family, we can see differences, in the bringing up of boys and of girls.

Future aspiration of girl and boy children

To evaluate the impact of this parental attitude on their aspiration the children were asked: What do you want to become? Few replies of the children:

S. no	Replies of Boys	Replies of Girls
●	Doctor	Teacher
●	Scientist	Doctor
●	Computer specialist	Nurse
●	Artist	Pilot
●	Actor	Air hostess
●	Engineer	Computer specialist
●	Pilot	Do not Know
●	Army	//
●	Do not Know	//
●	Banker	Dress Designer

The interviews with teachers and parents show that parents and teachers verbal remarks play an important role in their children’s aspirations. The researcher found that the parents were more ambitious about their sons. Beside that daughters are involved in domestic tasks. In rural areas the young girls of five to six years also look after their younger siblings. So they can not spend much time in their studies. Teachers without knowing the home background of children by observing daily performance of girls and boys got the impressions that girls take less interest in the school education. Due to parents’ and teachers’ different attitudes towards girls and boys, most of the girls were less confident while expressing their future aspirations as compared to that of the boys.

CONCLUSION:

The parents play a very important role in creating gender differences at home and society at large. At home, the young girls are involved in domestic chores, where boys remain free to enjoy games and spend more time in studies. The parents explicitly expressed that their sons were going to become doctors and engineers. They were not ambitious about girls’ education.

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The gender difference creates hindrances in the developmental process of our children from the time of birth. Parents, teachers and community lack understanding of the influence of gender biases in the children's progress and development. There is a need to develop a positive attitude in the socialization process of girl and boy children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Parents' awareness about gender issues is crucial. The conclusion drawn from this study led to concrete recommendations for the improvement in equal treatment of female and male children from their early childhood.
2. The provision of early childhood education should be equally available to the female and male children.
3. Through dialogue and discussions parents and community should be supported to bring positive changes in their thoughts about the needs of a girl and boy child.
4. Through media i.e. television, newspapers, posters etc awareness should be developed about gender biases in the parents, teachers and community and educate them how to bring a positive change in their attitude towards a girl and a boy child.
5. The educational policy of Pakistan should motivate parents and teachers to encourage their daughters to be educated as well as use their rights to play and enjoy their childhood.
6. In a teacher education program a single module about how gender plays its role in school should be introduced.

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