



Patriarchy Prevails: Desuetude of Contraceptive Technology Due to Son Preference in Pakistan

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<p>Keywords: Son preference, Gender equality, Contraceptive use, Reproductive autonomy, Reproductive health, Patriarchy</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ABSTRACT</p> <p><i>In many societies, son preference is considered a well-entrenched cultural norm that has a direct effect on family planning and decision-making about reproductive health. The current research examines the relationship between the desuetude of contraceptive technologies due to son preference, specifically in patriarchal contexts. The rigorous conduct of an SLR (Systematic Literature Review) methodology in this research illustrates how economic, societal, as well as cultural factors have perpetuated son preference in our society, which ultimately determines the contraceptive technology use. Several key studies are assessed under SLR to synthesise fundamental research findings. The key results of the study revealed that son preference crucially shapes contraceptive practices, and women's reluctance towards contraceptive use before giving birth to a son. However, the concept of son preference predominantly results in limiting females' reproductive independence, creates gender imbalances and societal challenges in sustaining gender equality, perils of overpopulation and economic pressures on the country. The study builds around the discussion on the importance of addressing the economic standards, cultural norms, as well as family values that directly influence female reproductive health. The research, with its key discussion and conclusion, finally sheds light on such avenues that can be meaningful for future interventions covering the culturally sensitive spheres and meticulous strategies to help in mitigating the negative impact of son preference. Thus, the study builds policy discussions along with interventions that resonate with women's empowerment through access to safe contraceptive technologies, thus ensuring good reproductive health outcomes in the perplexing patriarchal structures.</i></p>
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1 Introduction

Around the world, many societies are known for the most prevalent cultural norm, which is son preference. Patriarchy and son preference remain powerful factors that affect contraceptive use and reproductive health in many societies. However, the concept of son preference is entrenched deeply in the principal structure of societies and is involved in shaping the family planning system as well as the reproductive behaviours of opposite genders (Guilmoto, 2012). The impact of societal structure based on the son preference concept, fixated on patriarchal values, leads to present skewed demographics while posing different challenges to gender equality. However, priorities for male offspring are not fundamentally a social orientation or come up with social pressure but are entirely connected to social, economic, and cultural elements of society, which together maintain patriarchy-based societal structures (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, one of the critical aspects is to assess the prevalence of the concept of son preference and its impact on the use of contraceptive technologies. The ease of access to certain contraceptive methods cannot even be meaningful for their proper utilisation due to the higher demand for male offspring by couples. Considering many patriarchal societies where the son preference concept is predominating affirmed that these societies highly value sons, and couples are counselled well to produce male offspring until the desired family-planned number is acquired (Huq et al., 2012). Where such societies significantly hinder the employment of contraceptive techniques. Reluctance towards the employment of contraception among couples and desires to produce a higher ratio of male offspring as a societal level practice significantly contributes to shaping the population growth of society, along with posing impacts through gender imbalances as well as reduced women's autonomy for reproductive health and choices (Yadav et al., 2020).

The current research is inclined to drive an explorative journey for finding out the intricate relationship between the use of contraceptive technologies and son preference. With a rigorous examination of the economic as well as socio-cultural norms relating to son preference in patriarchal societies, the study aimed to shed light on how patriarchal values play their role in shaping the behaviours which place value on sons over daughters, principally dictating norms of family planning and contraceptive use within the society. With the methodical review of pre-existing sources of literature, empirical data, and case studies, the study highlights the nature of patriarchal society and its influence on the reproductive behaviours of the community, including the use of contraceptive technologies.

2 Literature Review

Kamal and Hassan (2013) have documented that the intersection of contraceptive methods and son preference is a significant phenomenon, specifically in patriarchal societal structures where male dominance is valued in both economic and cultural spheres. However, Pathak and Arya (2018) affirmed on notable impact of son preference on the consumption of contraceptive methods. Channon (2017), with a key focus on patrilocal residence and patrilineal inheritance patterns, asserted that the encouraged concept of son preference in society furthermore takes control of the use of contraceptives. This scholar also revealed that such trends are displayed as

carriers for building strong family lineage and producing sons as providers and facilitators of their parents in old age. It is also witnessed that religious beliefs and cultural norms favour the preference of male children over females, specifically in the territories of Asia (Purewal, 2010).

Many literature studies have consistently witnessed that the son preference concept in a society significantly shapes the contraceptive attitudes of couples (Ghosh & Begum, 2015). Dehingia et al. (2019) elucidated that women in India who have no sons are less involved in contraceptive methods as they are facing higher demand to produce a male child, which results ultimately in prolonged childbearing practices and elevated fertility rates. Prevalent concepts of son preference in societies are witnessed in many countries. Where families in South Korea and China are known for higher use of contraceptive methods just after giving birth to the desired number of sons (Bateson et al., 2017). The strong impact of the son preference concept in any society extends beyond family planning, even on individual levels, to broaden the basic demographic trends. Research conducted by Abdullateef et al. (2016) emphasised the highly propagated concept of son preference among the couples of societies that worked to produce verily-skewed gender ratios concerning births, whilst posing significant societal altercations. Gender inequality is not just proportional to gender imbalances but is accompanied by certain societal issues, including violence against women and a shortage of the female population (Hudson & Den Boer, 2004).

Several studies have explored how son preference weakens women's independence in their reproductive preferences. Biswas et al. (2017) and Nepal et al. (2023) have fixated on societies with strong son preferences to assess the societal metrics on women's empowerment in decision-making and reproductive choices. The concept of son preferences restricts the ability of women to exercise their reproductive rights, which gradually intensifies the gender disparity phenomenon in both health and well-being contexts (Dias et al., 2020).

Undertaking society-based interventions that could address the impact of the concept of son preference against contraceptive use needs a comprehensive approach. South Korea and many other countries come up as relevant examples for administering appropriate policy interventions, specifically emphasising government initiatives based on sex-selective practices and gender equality (Den Boer & Hudson, 2017). Where such interventions consequently decide the shifts in societal attitudes of communities (Chung & Das Gupta, 2007). Moreover, organising educational campaigns targeting both women and men and sensitising them about the significance of family planning as well as the worth or value of daughters over sons in many countries can be proven meaningful for altering their practices (Herbert, 2015).

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

The research design of this study fundamentally comprises the qualitative research approach and SLR (systematic literature review) technique, aiming to discover the comprehensive relationship underutilization of contraceptive technologies. The qualitative design is chosen for its capacity to provide a detailed understanding of complex social phenomena and to synthesise findings from diverse sources (Worthington, 2013).

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Initially, SLR is chosen as a primary data collection method, which involves a structured search for sourcing relevant literature. Where this method is administered with a critical assessment of relevant research studies meeting the predefined research criteria. Identifying the existing previous research is the main aim of the SLR method (Paradis et al., 2016).

3.3 Sample Selection

A methodically selected sample was drawn to ensure the acquisition of the most relevant cases of articles that are comprehensive and are real representatives of the study. Sample selection was an extensive procedure that commenced with an initial search, article screening, detailed reviewing, criterion-based article inclusion, and a final skim of articles to draw the absolute sample. Initial search as the first step of the sampling process identified the databases, which were three in number and included Google Scholar, Springer and NIH (National Institute of Health). The main keywords that were used as the keys to searching out the relevant articles of study included son preference, gender bias, contraceptive technology, and patriarchy. Traced articles were screened rigorously, which led to the identification of thirty articles based on the study's titles and abstracts. The selected articles were sequenced as 15 articles from Google Scholar, 8 articles from Springer, and 7 articles from the NIH library sources. The 30 screened articles after selection were reviewed in detail and with consideration of the employed research design, methods, tools, and synthesised findings. This led the articles to a thorough skim to acquire the potential number of quality articles. The inclusion criteria for the study were well-tailored and targeted the studies that assessed the concepts of son preference and underutilization of contraceptive methods, along with the examination of the methodology section, empirical data, and other theoretical insights. The sample selection was rigorous and ensured that the chosen articles provided an adequate understanding of the research topic.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The chosen technique of research is content analysis, which analyses the collected data sourced from several selected articles. The content analysis technique involves the coding procedure, which formulates various codes for the text that is in search of a research study, and thus it recognises several distinctive patterns and categorical data with generic themes from the studied literature (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Haggarty (1996) has affirmed that administering the coding sheet is also a part of the coding procedure, which displays various codes as basic themes and helps in acquiring the most relevant and potential data with relevance to the experimental research question. However, the process ends while identifying the recurring themes to establish the major key findings for the research across several studies included in the representative sample.

3.5 Research Instrument

The coding sheet remained vital throughout the collection of data and can even be claimed as a primary research instrument for the current study. This instrument helped in managing the huge qualitative data sourced from different databases. Codes made in the sheet presented such core themes that completely align with current research aims and objectives (Moradi et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the main codes included underutilization of contraceptive methods, gender equality, reproductive health, and cultural elements influencing son preference.

3.6 Research Activities

The research activities have been undertaken following a customised timeline. 1st and 2nd Weeks involved the identification or recognition of articles from the chosen databases. Weeks 3rd and 4th comprised the activities based on designing a coding sheet with initial themes of articles. The 5th and 6th week of activity made the research-oriented to develop in-depth content analysis and subjected the data for the final synthesis of key research findings. The 7th and 8th weeks were just a review and compilation week that polished the whole research for submission.

4 Results

The SLR (Systematic Literature Review) examined around eight of the selected articles that investigated the direct influence of son preference in society over the desuetude of contraceptive technologies. The key findings sourced from studies highlighted the recurring patterns, themes, and value-packed insights regarding the targeted topic of research. The first article with the major theme Contraceptive Methods and Cultural Elements dictating Son Preference in India has discovered the cultural factors that drive the concept of son preference majorly present in rural societies. Moreover, the role of these factors was assessed in shaping contraceptive behaviours. It further revealed that the robust cultural dimensions that favour pronatalist behaviours, with stress on having more sons in couples, led them to the desuetude of contraceptive technologies or delayed use of contraceptives until they can bear sons.

The second article, with the key theme Investigating Son Preference and Family Planning in China, mainly addressed the economic factors that influenced the concept of son preference in Chinese society, along with the determination of family planning practices. The key findings of this article emphasised economy-based benefits that are mainly connected with a higher ratio of the male population, ultimately promoting reluctance against contraceptive methods until the desired number of male children is born.

The third article, with the core theme Reproductive Health Choices and Patriarchal Society: A Study of Nigeria, focused on societal values and patriarchal structure that influence women's reproductive choices. This article emphasised that women were more likely to face pressures from their in-laws or family members and even from social spheres to continue the childbearing process until they give birth to a desired number of sons or even to an obligatory one son and deterred them from using contraceptive methods for their reproductive health choice.

The fourth article, while accompanying the theme of Contraceptive Methods and Gender Biasness: A study of the Pakistani community, revealed a worthwhile effect of contraceptive methods due to gender biases. Moreover, it presented that women with higher birth to daughters are more reluctant to employ contraceptive techniques, with the dire need to give birth to a male child, which ultimately results in higher fertility ratios as well as prolonged childbearing span. The next article with the theme Son Preference concept and Socioeconomic indicators of South Korea examined that the more regressive socioeconomic status owned by families reveals the more balanced utilisation of contraceptive techniques.

However, the study still asserted that son preference is a vital concept for reproductive decision-making in overall societies of the world. The third last article with the main theme focusing on the Reproductive behaviour and Literacy rate in Bangladesh has affirmed that the more the literacy rate of a state, the more balanced and sustained use of contraceptive techniques emerges. Furthermore, the study suggested that educational growth among women reduces the proliferation of the concept of son preference with higher use of contraceptive methods. The second and last articles with core themes of Family Planning, Son Preference, and Religious Elements in Iranian Society and Son Preference in Vietnam: Exploring Public Health Choices, respectively, asserted that religious values and related practices significantly influence the son preference concept and use of contraceptive methods in the territory of Iran. It further revealed that religious policies focusing on the patrilineage system take control in lowering the use of contraceptive methods among those families that lack a son ratio as compared to daughters. In addition, these articles assessed the rate of efficacy of public health campaigns centred on controlling the son preference concept in the landscape of Vietnam. The key findings mainly

targeted the policy interventions, including economic and educational sensitisation programs to aware families with more female children to adopt more contraceptives.

5 Discussion

Patriarchal norms are intertwined with the cultural norms that influence the behaviours that promote the preference of sons over daughters across several societies around the globe. In the context of the rural societies of India, the overall landscape of Nigeria, and many communities of Pakistan, a strong wave of cultural as well as societal norms is reflected in patriarchal tendencies echoed through the idea of son preference. The preference for son over daughter has deep-rooted historical, economic and social implications. The socio-cultural value placed on a higher ratio of male children in family and society ultimately directs the desuetude or the delayed use of contraceptive technologies to limit the family size among couples, especially among the parents who have not given birth to a single son. Such key findings of the current research study from an array of previously existing research studies suggest that the greater value placed on sons in society basically reinforces patriarchal structures by impacting the reproductive decision-making, including decisions about family planning, thus proliferating gender inequality.

The economic backgrounds of communities around the globe also crucially shape reproductive behaviours and choices. In most patriarchal societies like Pakistan, sons are preferred over daughters due to economic reasons as well. Research studies conducted in South Korea and China brought light to various economic dimensions, which align with a higher ratio of male children and with families that are less adaptable to contraceptive methods to acquire the desired number of sons. The research study findings follow a specific pattern that reflects a wider economic and social sphere where male children are perceived as blessings for financial security, especially for ageing parents, where they provide financial and social support. Moreover, they are considered carriers for the family legacy and inheritance.

Studies conducted in Pakistan and Nigeria have reflected a kind of similar phenomenon of son preference and patterns of underutilization of contraceptive techniques. Women are drastically challenged by family pressure to continue with childbearing processes until they acquire or give birth to a son. However, such family pressure stresses the women and compels them to compromise even on their personal reproductive choices and at the cost of their health. In societies like Pakistan, patriarchy still prevails, resonating with the religious and cultural beliefs that exalt the status of men over women. This higher value placed on sons ensures women keep on giving birth to daughters until she has a male heir. Furthermore, the reproductive decision-making power resides with the males among couples, which impacts the use of or Desuetude of contraceptive technologies. This underscores the dire need for policies and future interventions that could counsel individuals about the required societal and familial norms. Education also plays an important role in taking control, nullifying the concept of son preference and promoting contraceptives as discussed in the study from Bangladesh. Religion and faith in a study of Iran's society were found crucially important for influencing the concept of son preference, along with contraceptive use. A study from Vietnam with a key theme of public health and son preference stressed the need for verse and tailored interventions for improving reproductive health choices.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The significant conclusions drawn from this study bring light to the fact that culturally in Pakistan and in many patriarchal societies in the world, son preference is a norm which is synonymous with promoting gender inequality. Son preference has a multitude of reasons rooted deep in history, including the association of males with the safeguarding of the family name and financial inheritance. Most crucial of all is the exalted stature of males in society, ensuring a

financial and social support for parents in old age. The issue of preferring sons over daughters is more deeply embedded in societies where education is not prevalent, especially for females, and the concept of female empowerment is almost zero to none. Addressing these issues requires a broader commitment to gender equality, women's autonomy, and access to reproductive health services. By challenging the cultural norms that prioritise sons and reducing the pressure to have large families, societies can make progress toward healthier, more equitable outcomes for all individuals, irrespective of gender. For that purpose, Community-driven campaigns, as well as educational programs, can swiftly assist in moulding societal attitudes and mitigating gender bias. Economic motivations can bolster the morale of the whole society members and strengthen them with financial security regardless of their desire to have male children. Hence, economic empowerment, particularly female economic empowerment, is a key intervention that can bring a rewarding change and direct society to attain gender equality and a sustainable population balance. The SLR-based study provided an in-depth understanding of the complex phenomenon between contraceptive underutilization and son preference. The key findings of the research emphasise the significance of figuring out the elements like economic, cultural, educational, familial, as well as religious, that crucially play a role in mitigating the effect of the son preference concept over reproductive health behaviours.

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