

Original Research Article

Perception and Determinants of Gender Preference among Men in Isoko South Local Government Council, Odeh, Delta State

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Some couples do not have the gender of children they prefer which could result in physical, psychological, sexual, obstetric and several other consequences. The present study was conducted among men to determine their perception of gender preference and factors responsible for their gender preference. **Objective:** To assess the perception of gender preference and factors responsible for gender preference among men. **Method:** A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select 143 out of 221 male Civil Servants from nine (9) different departments. The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed Questionnaire on Perception and Determinants of Gender Preference (QPDGP). The reliability of the instrument was established through the test-retest method using Cronbach's alpha which yielded co-efficient of 0.82. Data collected were summarized using frequencies and percentages. **Results:** the results showed that 90 (62.9%) men preferred male gender. For 79 (55.2%) men, the choice of gender was aimed at psychological satisfaction in marriage. Also, 77 (53.8%) preferred male children because they had better initiative, were easier to train 101 (70.6%), to allow for security of family inheritance 142 (99.3%) and continuity of family name 141 (98.6%). Some reasons given for female child preference were better ability to take care of younger ones 99 (69.2%), support to aged parents 115 (80.4%) and being a reliable emotional support 88 (61.5%). **Conclusion:** Male gender preference is strongly perceived among the men. It was recommended that reproductive health services be modified to allow male involvement.

KEYWORDS: Perception, Determinants, Gender Preference, Men.

1. INTRODUCTION

The allocation of parental time and market resources across children by parents in developing countries can be linked to preference for the sex of the child [1]. According to [2] children who receive more investment in the form of nutrition, parental time or educational inputs perform better during childhood and adulthood. For over two (2) decades, gender equality has been explicitly recognized as a key not only to the health of nations, but also to their social and economic development [3]. The importance of gender equality is further emphasized by the

fact that promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment finds itself as Sustainable Development Goal five (SGD 5) [4].

Nigeria recorded a fertility rate of 5.46 children per woman in year 2017 and 5.39 children per woman in 2018 [5]. According to [6] high fertility rate is partly due to gender preference. Gender preference may take the form of son or daughter preference [7,8]. Unfortunately, some couples do not have the gender of children they prefer. [9] observed that gender preference among parents manifest so blatantly that some parents fail to consider the effects of repeated and closely spaced pregnancies as well as sex-selective abortions. Failure to achieve the preferred gender has resulted in withdrawal of prior spousal support during pregnancy, persistent pressure on women even by unsupportive husbands to have more children or out rightly resorting to polygamy. Hence, there is anxiety associated with failure to have preferred child-sex among women, which has compelled many pregnant women to demand to know the sex of their unborn children during obstetric ultrasonography with significant reduction in birth interval whenever the child's gender is not the type desired by such mothers [10]. In the opinion of [3,11], gender preference has a role in determining the sex ratio and the quality of care given to a child. In turn, the quality of care given to a child ultimately determines the child's survival, mental and overall health status.

The norm in some societies and cultures somehow makes male more socially and economically valuable than female. This invariably leads to a strong desire among young couples to have sons and not daughters or having more sons than daughters (son preference). According to Ohagwu et al. [10], whenever a child is born and the sex is determined as a male, it means greater joy for the parents who prefer sons. The father is joyful because he has a man who will take after his name and continue his family line after his death. The mother is also joyful because

her marriage becomes consolidated. However, if the child is a girl, the couple receive the news with mixed feelings. Although, the sadness becomes pronounced if the female child is coming as the third, fourth, fifth or sixth female in a family without a male child. For the man, it brings sorrow because his hope of having a male child to continue his lineage is becoming slimmer, the females will someday be married off to other men. Son preference has its own manifestations and implications both for family and the society. At the society level son preference results in high skewed sex ratios whereas, at the family level son preference places intense pressure on women to produce male child(ren) [3].

In some communities in the southern region of Nigeria, women are seen as assets because the tradition of bride price which was originally used as a means of legalizing and recognizing marriage is seen as a proper business transaction [1]. Hence, having girl children (daughter preference) means having good source of income [12]. Daughters are also commonly preferred when other siblings are of the male gender, for companionship and because daughters are reliable assistants both in household tasks as well as are dependable help during morbidity, at old age and in the care of other siblings [13]. Furthermore, Igbo [6] mentioned that gender preference which is influenced by psychologic, social, economic and cultural factors such as care for parents at old age, title inheritance, morbidity issues and patriarchy (where in the oldest male is the leader of the family), to mention only four has societal variations.

Most studies on gender preference were conducted among women but this study intends to focus on men because by virtue of their position as head of the family, they are major decision makers and significant influences to their partner's decision. Unfortunately, men are sometimes considered a neglected group in reproductive health services [14], because most of the services are female oriented, thereby implying that the direct effect and consequences are on the woman's

health and wellbeing alone. Considering the impact of gender preference on the care and general upbringing of children, and the physical, psychological, sexual, obstetric implications of not achieving the preferred gender among mothers, as well as the threat that gender preference poses to family unity, this study aimed to assess the perception, and determinants of gender preference among men working in Isoko South Local Government Council, Oleh, Delta State.

1.1 Objectives

Specifically, the perception of gender preference and factors considered to be responsible for gender preference among men in Isoko South Local Government Council of Oleh were assessed. The study is a helpful approach to ascertain the acceptance of children and male involvement in issues relating to pregnancy and childbirth as well as, spousal support irrespective of the fetal gender.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This study was a descriptive survey. A descriptive survey research design allows the use of instruments such as questionnaire to collect data from a representative sample on existing or specific variables at a given time, without manipulating them, and to generalize the findings in a population [15].

2.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Isoko South Local Government Council, Oleh, Delta State. The Council was purposively selected because its workforce represents people from different disciplines at the grass root level of the socio-economic system in Delta State, and are drawn from the 25 Local Government Areas of the State because the Local Government Service operates a Unified Service system. Oleh is the Local Government head quarter and is located in

the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It is developing into an economic nerve centre and has a campus of the State University, many public and private enterprises.

2.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all men working in Isoko South Local Government Council, Oleh, Delta State. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select 143 out of 221 male Civil Servants from nine (9) different departments. The inclusion criteria for participants were; being a male staff of Isoko South Local Government Council, **an affirmation to** having a gender preference and willingness to participate in the study.

2.4 Instrument

The Questionnaire on Perception and Determinants of Gender Preference (QPDGP) developed by the researcher was used in the collection of data. QPDGP contains thirty-one (31) items and comprises three (3) sections (Sections A, B and C). Section A elicited information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents with eight (8) items. Section B consisted of five (5) items which elicited information on perception of gender preference. Section C comprised eighteen (18) items under three (3) sub-scales namely: marital, personal and cultural determinants of gender preference. Two (2) experts, lecturers in Maternal and Child Health Nursing specialty from Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island and Measurement and Evaluation unit from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established through test-retest method using Cronbach's Alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.82.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval for the study was obtained on June 29, 2020 from the Primary Health Care Development Authority, Oleh. The researcher obtained informed consent from the Heads of Department who granted access to the respondents. Informed consent was also obtained from the respondents who voluntarily participated in the study. The respondents were assured that their anonymity, confidentiality and privacy would be maintained during and after data collection.

2.6 Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were administered face to face by the researcher in each department. Data collection was done during lunch break on working days. The completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved on the spot, and there was 100% return rate. The data collection lasted for a period of two (2) week.

2.7 Data Analysis

Data collected from QPDGP were summarized and presented as frequencies and percentages.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Table 1 shows that majority 55 (38.5%) of the respondents were within the age bracket of 34-42years, while minority 6 (4.2%) were aged 25-33years. 105 (73.4%) of the men were married, while 31 (21.7%) were single. 104 (72.7%) belonged to the Isoko ethnic group, while 3(2.1%) were Ijaws. The highest level of education was tertiary level for 65 (45.5%) and primary level for 18 (12.6%) of the respondents. Among the respondents, 131 (91.6%) practiced Christianity, while 12 (8.4%) practiced Traditional African Religion. 78 (54.5%) of the men had 1-4 children, while 7 (4.9%) had 9 children or more. 87 (60.8%) of the respondents had male and

female children, while 13 (9.1%) had only female child (ren). Majority 96 (67.1%) of the men had reached their family size.

Table 1: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (n = 143)

S/N	Socio-demographic characteristics	Variable classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Age (in Years)	25-33 34-42 43-51 52-60	6 55 49 33	4.2 38.5 34.3 23.1
2.	Marital status	Single Married Separated Widowed	31 105 2 5	21.7 73.4 1.4 3.5
3.	Ethnic group	Isoko Urhobo Ika Ndokwa Aniocha/Oshimili Itshekiri Ijaw	104 13 6 7 5 5 3	72.7 9.1 4.2 4.9 3.5 3.5 2.1
4.	Highest Education Level	Primary Secondary Tertiary	18 60 65	12.6 42 45.5
5.	Religion	Christianity Islam Traditional African religion	131 0 12	91.6 0 8.4
6.	Number of living Children	None 1-4 5-8 9 or more	27 78 31 7	18.9 54.5 21.7 4.9
7.	Sex of Children	None Male Female Male and Female	27 16 13 87	18.9 11.2 9.1 60.8
8.	Have you reached your desired family size	Yes No	96 47	67.1 32.9

Table 2 shows that majority 62.9% preferred the male gender. Among the respondents, 57.3% preferred to grant male children access to tertiary education and 51.7% preferred to

provide female children with timely access to healthcare. More than half of the respondents (53.1%) said that female children will easily receive a favour from them and, about two-third (64.3%) said that they had special closeness for female children.

Table 2: Perception of gender preference among respondents (n = 143)

S/N	Perception of Gender Preference	Variable classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
9.	Preferred gender	Male Female	90 53	62.9 37.1
10.	Which gender would you prefer to grant access to tertiary education?	Male Female	82 61	57.3 42.7
11.	Which gender would you prefer to provide timely access to healthcare?	Male Female	69 74	48.3 51.7
12.	Which gender would easily receive your favour?	Male Female	67 76	46.9 53.1
13.	Which gender do you have special closeness for?	Male Female	51 92	35.7 64.3

Table 3 reveals that the choice of gender for majority of the respondents (55.2%) was to give them psychological satisfaction in marriage, 39.2% was to satisfy their partner and, 58% was to avoid pressure from relatives.

Table 3: Marital determinants of gender preference among respondents (n = 143)

S/N	Marital determinants	Variable Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
14.	Psychological Satisfaction in marriage	Yes No	79 64	55.2 44.8
15.	Satisfy my partner	Yes No	56 87	39.2 60.8
16.	Avoid pressure from relatives	Yes No	83 60	58 42

Table 4 reveals that in the opinion of some respondents, males were preferred for having better initiative (53.8%), for companionship (60.1%), for being easier to train (70.6%) and, because they are more hardworking (55.9%). Among the respondents, some others (69.2%)

preferred female children because they have better ability to take care of younger ones, have ability to assist in performing domestic chores (68.5%), for being a reliable emotional support (61.5%), for being more supportive to aged parents (80.4%) and for **willingly** helping the family out in emergencies (72%).

Table 4: Personal determinant of gender preference among respondents (n = 143)

S/N	Personal determinant	Variable Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
17.	Better Initiative	Male	77	53.8
		Female	66	46.2
18.	Take care of Younger ones	Male	44	30.8
		Female	99	69.2
19.	Companionship	Male	86	60.1
		Female	57	39.9
20.	Ability to assist in performing domestic chores	Male	45	31.5
		Female	98	68.5
21.	Reliable emotional Support	Male	55	38.5
		Female	88	61.5
22.	Easier to Train	Male	101	70.6
		Female	42	29.4
23.	More supportive to aged parents	Male	28	19.6
		Female	115	80.4
24.	Willing to help the family out in emergencies	Male	40	28
		Female	103	72
25.	More hard working	Male	80	55.9
		Female	63	44.1

Table 5 shows that almost all the respondents preferred males because in their culture males are required when cultural rites need to be performed (98.6%), to secure family inheritance (99.3%) and, for continuity of family name (98.6%). In the opinion of majority (84.6%) of the respondents bride price paid on daughters during their traditional marriage is a notable resource and, gives prestige to fathers (93.7%), while for 93% having a son gives prestige to men in their culture.

Table 5: Cultural determinants of gender preference among respondents (n = 143)

S/N	Cultural determinants	Variable Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
26.	Required for performance of cultural rites	Male	141	98.6
		Female	2	1.4
27.	Secure family inheritance	Male	142	99.3
		Female	1	0.7
28.	Continuity of family name	Male	141	98.6
		Female	2	1.4
29.	Bride price is a notable resource	Yes	121	84.6
		No	22	15.4
30.	Bride price payment gives prestige to fathers	Yes	134	93.7
		No	9	6.3
31.	Having a son gives prestige to men in my culture	Yes	133	93
		No	10	7

3.2 Discussion

Gender preference is a significant topic of discussion among men especially in a developing country like Nigeria where there is preference for sons, desire to have equal number of male and female children or, the desire to have at least one child of each sex. This study provides new data on perception and determinants of gender preference among men. This study is relevant because, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, it is one of the initial studies regarding gender preference among men, hence findings were also compared with the opinion of women and couples/parents. The findings of this study revealed that 62.9% of the men preferred the male gender. In a related study by Nithin, Tanuj, Unnikrishnan, Rekha, Prasanna, Vaman, Ramesh, Darshan and Samskruthi [16] male preference was reported by 29/52 (55.7%) of pregnant women receiving antenatal care in coastal South India. Furthermore, separate studies from Egypt [13], Nepal [17], and China [18] showed a strong preference for sons over daughters. [19] observed that male child preference has remained an age long cultural value among the Igbos in South Eastern Nigeria. In the opinion of [20] parents prefer sons over daughters in the United States but boy preference may be fading because of changing views about women.

Results of this study showed that 57.3% preferred to grant male children access to tertiary education and 51.7% preferred to provide female children with timely access to healthcare. However, 53.1% said that female children will easily receive a favour from them and, 64.3% said that they had special closeness for female children. In a study by Ubendu and Sulaiman [21] in Lagos West Senatorial district, Lagos State, it was observed that 65.1% of parents had warm and friendly relationship with their male children and, 63% had warm and friendly relationship with their female children. Raley and Bianchi [22] noted that fathers spend more time with sons than with daughters. It was also reported that parental support of educational activities varies, with some parental behaviors greater for sons and others higher for daughters. According to Nithin [16] son preference and daughter neglect has been associated with death of millions of females through infanticide, improper nutrition and lack of medical care.

Furthermore, the choice of gender for 55.2% of the respondents was to give them psychological satisfaction in marriage, 39.2% was to satisfy their partner and, 58% was to avoid pressure from relatives. In a study conducted by Chellaiyan, Adhikary, Das, Taneja and Daral [23] in Delhi, it was observed that one of the major reasons quoted for male child preference was pressure from family. According to Hank and Kohler [24] children of a particular sex are often desired in order to provide certain utilities or to minimize financial or psychological costs. In a similar study by Ohagwu et al. [10] in Anambra State, results showed that some pregnant women (22.2%, 175/790) wanted to have male babies in their present pregnancies for various reasons predominant of which was protecting their marriages and cementing their places in their husbands' hearts. There is positive relationship between satisfaction with family life and psychological wellbeing [25].

The findings of this study revealed that males were preferred for having better initiative (53.8%), for companionship (60.1%), for being easier to train (70.6%) and, because they are more hardworking (55.9%). Sons are presumed to have greater economic net utility than daughters, since they provide assistance in agriculture, as well as in primitive social security system [24]. In the present study results showed that 69.2% of the men preferred daughters because they have better ability to take care of younger ones, have ability to assist in performing domestic chores (68.5%), are a reliable emotional support (61.5%), are more supportive to aged parents (80.4%) and are more helpful to the family in emergencies (72%). In a study by Vardhan and Rao [26] in India, it was observed that sons are preferred for being supportive to aged parents. In the opinion of Hank and Kohler [24] daughters are thought to be more reliable in providing old age assistance, particularly emotional support. Daughters are also preferred because they help with household tasks and care for their younger ones.

Another important finding was that the male civil servants preferred males because in their culture males are required when cultural rites need to be performed (98.6%), to secure family inheritance (99.3%) and, for continuity of family name (98.6%). [24] observed that quite often sons fill sex-specific religious roles and insure kinship continuity in patrilineal societies. [26] noted that son preference by majority of married adults in India was because males undertake social responsibilities, perform cremation for parents and propagate the family name. Women's preference for a male child in Pakistani was strongly predicted by their perceptions of having been disadvantaged by their gender in their families of origin [27]. In the opinion of majority (84.6%) of the respondents bride price paid on daughters during their traditional marriage is a notable resource and, gives prestige to fathers (93.7%), while for 93% having a son gives prestige to men in their culture. Chellaiyan, et al. [23] opined that in Delhi, the girl child is

perceived as a burden because dowry has to be given during her marriage. Also [23] found out that females were preferred by 6 (13.95%) married women in Delhi because girls will grow up to be more responsible. According to [26] the main reason for non-preference of daughter is that the girl child leaves her parents after marriage.

4. CONCLUSION

Male gender preference is strongly perceived among the men, notwithstanding, female children easily received favors from majority of the men. Also, the choice of gender was majorly aimed at psychological satisfaction in marriage. For some men, male children were preferred because they had better initiative, were easier to train, to allow for security of family inheritance and continuity of family name. Some reasons given for female child preference were better ability to take care of younger ones, support to aged parents and being a reliable emotional support. These findings are helpful approach to the involvement of men in reproductive health services. The findings will also be useful in planning programmes that will promote the acceptance and education of children irrespective of their gender, to enhance family unity, maternal wellbeing and productiveness among all children.

Ethical Approval:

As per international standard or university standard ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

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