

An Evaluation of The Dynamics of Male Child Preference Among Married Couples In Esan, Edo State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: *In most part of African and Asian cultures studies have shown that preference for male children is more pronounced than the females based on some socio - cultural considerations. But in the recent time, other studies have revealed a dynamic trend towards preference for female children in some of these cultures. In view of this development, this study investigated, among others, the current trend and pattern for female child preference. The data for this study were sourced from both qualitative and quantitative sources. The data were analyzed through patterning, systematic analysis of qualitative data and simple percentage for the quantitative data. The study discovered that while there is still more preference for the male children but there is a steady rise towards female child preference. However, such preference for female children has been found to be conditional and selective depending on the context under which such preference is considered. The study thus submitted that the steady preference for females in the study population is an instrumental preference because it's derived benefits or intrinsic value from such action. The policy implications of this study is that gender preference should be based on merit, equity or fair play and not by the dictates of the custom of the people.*

KEYWORDS: *Gender Preference, Son, Esan, Instrumental Preference, Culture.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the course of human co-existence every community had to design norms to regulate and guide human conduct and actions in a bid to ensuring a peaceful and tranquil social relationship. This necessitated the formulation of rules and regulations which are reflective in the traditions and customs of every society today. As part of these cultural imperatives, every society engages in the process of the definition and description of roles and responsibilities for its member of the society. As it were, these roles and responsibilities are allocated or specified by gender. Members of the society place different premiums on these societal roles as performed by male and female gender. The cultural specificities by gender inform the appreciation and relative importance of one gender to the other. In most developing cultures of the world the male gender has been mostly favoured in this cultural arrangement than their female counterpart (Nidhi & Chattopdhyay, 2011). This relative preference of male child to daughter is dependent on many economic, social, cultural and demographic factors as well as the roles assigned to the sexes in many third world countries (Bhatia, 1984). While perceived relevant functions and responsibilities are assigned to the male children, secondary and subordinated duties are given to the female children. They are socialized into secondary roles like giving respect and priority needs to the male members of the family. These cultural settings invariably reflect the social status of women in most cultures of the world and this has created unequal social relationship between the men and women for ages (Aderinto, 2001).

Within the Nigerian cultures, including the study population, the prevalence and prominence of male preference as against female children in their social relationship are evidently pronounced. Different responsibilities are assigned to the male and female gender for the development and survival of the society at large. These roles and responsibilities as performed by both gender are believed to be unique and valued differently by the traditional authorities. While it is believed that the roles performed by the men are highly appreciated and valued that of the women, though complimentary, are regarded as secondary roles (Edewor, 2006; Okogie, 1994).

Statement of Problem:

The preference for male children is a general trend in most developing societies of the world. (Prahbjot 1999; Bhatia, 1984). While the preference for a male child is not limited to developing societies alone, to some extent, there is also evident to show that in developed societies the desire for a male child is prevalent but the degree of prevalence varies between these societies. In some societies male child preference is so intense and sex selective practices so common that the number of boys being born outnumbered that of girls. This is because in a culture where male child are highly valued the desire to have male children continues until such family gets at least one (Margot 2013; Eguavoen, Odiagbe, & Obetoh, 2007; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994). In the long run such families would have gone beyond their original desire to have a specified number of children.

The high premium placed on male child especially in developing countries of the world have been linked to a number of economic, religious and social factors. In most of these societies male children are believed to be sources of assistance to their families in agricultural activities and social security at old age even in sickness. There are some exclusive religious rituals reserved for male child alone. Male children are also regarded as links to kinship continuity (Barot, 2012). This is especially true in most African and some Asian countries where the prevalence of male child preference is rooted in variety of factors which make male child more socially and economically valuable than females. In these societies inheritance is highly patrilineal, ageing parents depend on male children in the absence of national social security schemes, greater male participation in workforce which allow them to contribute meaningfully to the family income. Only male children have the exclusive rights to perform special religious and cultural functions such as death rituals for parents, (Nidhi & Chattopdyhyay, 2011; Okojie, 1994). All these traditional norms further reinforce the devaluation of women in these cultures.

While male preference is a general trend in these societies, but the degree of prevalence between the urban and rural areas varies. Some scholars had observed that socio-cultural differences between the urban and rural areas in terms of marriage practices, kinship structure, property inheritance rights and status of women, among others, are critical determinants which influence the differences in the value of male child in these areas (Nidhi & Aparajita, 2011; Prahbjot, 1999; Dasgupta, 1987). It is also noted that rural areas has stronger male child preference than urban areas (Barot, 2012; Bhatia, 1984).

Available literature have shown that an enlightened and a highly educated population could influence gender preference. While the continued education of female children, have been found to steadily increase preference for female children (Edewor, 2006; Bhatia, 1984). In the recent time more female children now access tertiary education especially with the establishment of the state –owned University within the study population and more other tertiary institutions around. In the light of this, it is therefore expected that preference for female children will be on the increase. From the above discourse, this study wants to investigate, among others, the current trend and pattern of female child preference as against the original pronounced and dominated preference for male children between urban and rural residents and among elitist (educated) group.

Objective of Study:

The main objective of this study is to examine the dynamics of male child preference as compared to female children among the Esan people of Edo, Nigeria. While the specific objectives are: to examine the trend and pattern of female children as compared to male children between the rural and urban centers; to investigate the influence of education on gender preference among the study population and to explore the current relevance of socio-cultural determinants of male preference in the study population.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no gainsaying the fact that in most African societies the preference for male child is an open secret which is very visible in their cultures. In most of these cultures where patriarchy exists the relevance and importance of male child over daughters cannot be over emphasized. This is the philosophy of patriarchy because in patriarchal societies the males dictate determine and define the affairs of the societies. To that extent male child preference in these cultures is most pervasive and pathetic to the extent that it contradicts and contravenes most international human rights law and also domesticated national laws which prohibit traditional harmful practices on gender ground. The preference for male child has been found to have great implications for the fertility rate of every society. In the quest to have a male child, couples continue to bear children until a male child is born even when it is against their original desire to born a specified number of children (Adebowale & Palamuleni, 2015; Eguavuen et al., 2007; Edewor 2006; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994; Bhatia 1984).

In most cases, couple desires a specified number of children to be borne at marriage but in the course of child rearing this original desire may be altered in the quest to have one or more of a particular sex. Studies have shown that gender preference and living children sex composition of children could influence couples

intention to bear more children even against their original desire (Adebowale & Palamuleni, 2015). If their desired for a particular sex is not among their living children, the tendency is that such couples continue to bear children until their desired sex is borne.

As Part of its programme of action, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo Egypt, had advocated that women, who already have about four surviving children, should be encouraged not to have intention to have more children (Adebowale & Palamuleni 2015). This means the ideal number of children a woman should have is four. In real life situation the ideal number of children a family desire to have is often different from actual family size. In a study involving some Nigerian couples, it was discovered that the ideal number of children is often different from the actual (Ibisomi, Gyimah, Muindi & Adjei, 2011). The implication is that the desired number of children may not be an ideal method to ascertain couples fertility rate, it could be hypothetical. Therefore, an attempt to reduce the total fertility rate of a country must consider gender preference and living children sex composition of couples if we are to get the desired result (Adebowale & Palamuleni 2015).

Some other studies have shown that a highly educated population and especially with the continued education of girls could lead to a lower preference for boys (Edewor, 2006; Bhatia 1984). With the post colonial era and the evolving national development, there were opportunities for people to access western education. Women who were hitherto not privileged to go to school were now educated. Western education as it were transforms domiciled minds and makes them to have new value systems as against the primordial. Similarly, with western education, preference for gender was also greatly influenced. In another context, the preference for male children has been found to be more pronounced and visible in the rural areas than urban centers. In India for instance, the desire for male child is relatively stronger amongst males in living in rural areas. Similarly, the preference is also stronger in developing countries than developed countries (Karsten & Kohler, 2000; Bhatia, 1984). The high premium placed on male child, especially in developing countries have been linked to varieties of economics, religious and social reasons. In some cultures male children are said to be very helpful in agricultural activities, they are believed to provide security at old age and in sickness; in most cultures they are only permitted to perform very important religious rituals; they are sources of kinship continuity, (Barot, 2012; Okogie, 1994; Bhatia, 1984).

However, male child preference is not limited to African societies alone. It is also noticeable in a number of South and East Asian countries like India, China, Singapore, Taiwan, Hongkong and South Korea, as well as in some Soviet bloc countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Serbia. (Barot, 2012; Prahbjot, 1999). Despite the continued economic advancement and rapid industrialization in developing countries, there is a high persistence of male child preference, (Adebowale & Palamuleni, 2015; Nidhi & Aparajita 2011; Arnold, 1997). But in Europe, the trend is for mixed – sex preference. However, there is a strong girl preference in some countries like Czech Republic, Lithuania and Portugal, (Karsten & Kohler 2000).

From the above discourse, many studies have shown the prevalence of male child preference in most developing societies of the world. But what this study attempts to investigate is to find out the trend for male preference: if this phenomenon is increasing or decreasing. Therefore the following questions, among others, will guide us in this study: What is the trend of male child's preference among couples resident in the rural and urban areas respectively? Is male child preference related to the level of education among couples? When a couple desire numbers of children are all boys, do they intend to have more in a bid to have a girl? When a couple desire numbers of children are all girls do they still desire to have more in a bid to born a boy? Are the determinants of male child's preference still relevant as they were in primordial time?

Methodology:

Esan communities are located in the central senatorial district of Edo state, south-south Nigeria. It is made up of five local government areas: Esan Central, Esan North East, Esan South East, Esan West and Igueben local government areas. From the official statistics of the National Population census figures of 2006, Esan has a total population of 519,534, wherein we have 299,695 males and 291,839 females. Esan west local government is purposively selected for this study because Ekpoma is the local government headquarters which hosts the state owned University. It has a high concentration of enlightened and highly educated residents. From the national census figures of 2006, Esan West has a total population of 127, 718 comprising 65,312 Males and 62,406 females. The study population is made up of ten political wards with each of the wards having a minimum three communities. Out of the ten political wards, seven of them – Illeh/Ekoh-Ineh (ward 1); Ujiojgba (ward 2); Egoro/Idoa/Ukhun (ward 3); Irukepken (wards 6); Urohi (ward 8); Uhieie (ward 9) and Ogwa (ward 10) are largely rural communities. While the other three wards Emaudo/Eguare/Ekpoma (ward4); Ihunmudumu/Idumebo/Ujemen (ward5); and Ukpenu/Ujoelen/Emuhi (ward7) are domiciled in the local government headquarter and to a great extent have features of urbanism.

Three hundred questionnaires were administered in all the ten political wards making it an average of thirty questionnaire per ward. In each of the wards, fifteen questionnaire were administered each to the married

men and women respectively. Through the assistance of respective communities' spokesmen and/or community leaders, where applicable, we were able to reach our final respondents who married men and women in each community. A total number of two hundred and eighty were finally retrieved from our respondents. Forty interview sections were conducted among married couples from the study population; they include traditional title holders, community women leaders, opinion leaders, family heads and community elders who are within the reproductive age. The break down shows eight interview sections (four for men and four for women) in the urban center and twelve interview sections (six for men and six for women) in the rural areas.

Data were collected through the administration of questionnaire and in-depth interview of some selected respondents who are mainly married couples within their reproductive years. Data from questionnaire were analyzed using simple percentage to measure the strength of agreement and disagreement while the qualitative data from the interview sessions were through content analysis and reproduction of some striking comments. The questions that were asked in the questionnaire and interview schedules include among others: the sex composition of respondents, their age, educational level and religion. Besides, respondents were asked, which of the sexes would they have desired to have first, they were asked to indicate the level of preference they have for their male children as compared to their daughters, if they desire to have more children when their living children sex composition are exclusively males or females and give reasons for their choice and they were asked to assess the relevance or utility of cultural determinants of male child preference in recent time. Simple percentage was used to analyze respondents' comments from the questionnaire while data from the interview schedule were analyzed by grouping and sorting out relevant comments and responses from respondents.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

Socio-Biological Data of Respondents

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Sex</i>		
Males	142	51
Females	138	49
Total	280	100
<i>Age</i>		
15-24	84	30
25-34	107	38
35-44	51	18
45-55	38	14
Total	280	100
<i>Educational Level</i>		
No formal education	24	9
Middle school	194	69
Tertiary	62	22
Total	280	100
<i>Religion</i>		
Christianity	192	69
Islam	51	18
African religion	37	13
Total	280	100
<i>Residents</i>		
Urban	116	41
Rural	164	59
Total	280	100

From the bio-data of respondents, 142(51%) males and 138(49%) females from the sampled frame were administered questionnaire. Respondents within the age category of 25-34 (38%) have the highest participants while respondents within the age category of 45-55 (14%) have the least. We have the highest number of respondents with elementary and middle school education. An insignificant few 24(9%) have no formal education. This group of respondents was mainly rural residents. Respondents who are Christians represent 192(69%) with Islam and African traditional religions having 51(18%) and 37(13%) respectively. In this study we have a higher number of rural residents 164(59%) while urban residents represent 116(41%) of the sampled population.

Cross-Tabulation and Responses of Respondents by Residents and Gender.

Variables	Responses	Urban		Rural		Total
		Men (59)	Women (57)	Men (83)	Women (81)	
Which of the sexes do you prefer to have first?	Boy	40(68%)	21(37%)	72(87%)	66(81%)	280
	Girl	19(32%)	36(63%)	11(13%)	15(19%)	
Which of the sexes do you prefer most	Son	22 (37%)	20(35%)	55(66%)	43(53%)	280
	Daughter	7 (12%)	10(18%)	5(6%)	13(16%)	
	Equal Preference	30 (51%)	27(47%)	23(28%)	25(31%)	
When all your children are males, do you still desire to have a daughter?	Yes	18(31%)	20(37%)	14(17%)	27(33%)	280
	No	41(69%)	37(65%)	69(83%)	54(67%)	
When all you children are females, do you still desire to have at least a son?	Yes	50 (85%)	36(63%)	77(93%)	67(83%)	280
	No	9 (15%)	21(37%)	6(7%)	14(17%)	
How relevant are the determinants of gender preference today?	Still relevant	29(49%)	24(42%)	51(61%)	46(57%)	280
	Loosing relevance	25(42%)	29(51%)	29(35%)	31(38%)	
	Not relevance	5(9%)	4(7%)	3(4%)	4(5%)	

Source: Field Work 2016

From the cross tabulation of respondents by residents, we discovered that out of the 59 men from urban center, majority of them 40(67%) would prefer to have a male child as their first born. Similarly, from the 83 men sampled in the rural areas, 72(87%) of them and the 81 women sampled from the rural areas, 66(81%) did report their desire to have a male child as their first born. On the other hand, only 36(63%) of the urban women preferred having a female child as their first issue/offspring as against their counterpart in the rural areas. On the question, which of the sexes do our respondents prefer most, it was observed that there is a steady trend towards equal preference for both gender among urban residents men and women alike – 30(51%) men and 27(47%). It is also evident from this question that the preferences for male children among the rural residents by men and women have not fundamentally changed. Majority of the respondents, which cut across residents and gender boundaries would not want to have more children when the sex composition of all their living children are males – 41(69%) men, 37(65%) women from urban residents; while we have 69(83%) men and 54(67%) women from rural residents. Contrastingly, most respondents, whether by resident or gender would not want to stop bearing children when the sex composition of their living children are all females- 50(85%) of urban men and 36(63%) of urban women; and 77(93%) of rural men and 67(83%) of rural women. This study also sought to know respondents views on the relevance of the determinants of male child preference in contemporary time. While 29(49%) of men and 24(42%) of women from the urban center and 51(61%) men and 46(57%) of women in the rural areas reported that these determinants are still relevant. On the other hand, 25(42%) of men and 29(51%) of women both from the urban centers; also 29(35%) of men and 31(38%) of women who are residents in the rural areas submitted that the determinants of male preference is losing its taste and flavor. However, an insignificant few respondents did report that all the determinants are not relevant today.

Cross-Tabulation and Responses of Respondents by Education and Gender.

Variables	Response s	No formal Education		Pry & Secondary Education		Tertiary Education		Total
		Men (8)	Women (16)	Men (113)	Women (81)	Men (37)	Women (25)	
When all your children are males do you still desire to have more children?	Yes	2(25%)	5(31%)	23(20%)	31(38%)	3(8%)	12(48%)	280
	No	6(75%)	11(69%)	90 (80%)	50(62%)	34(92%)	13(52%)	
Incase all your children are females do you still desire to have a son?	Yes	7(88%)	13(81%)	107(95%)	72(89%)	25(68%)	17(68%)	280
	No	1 (13%)	3(19%)	6(5%)	9(11%)	12(32%)	8(32%)	
Generally which of the sexes do you prefer most?	Son	5 (63%)	10(63%)	67(59%)	46(57%)	17(46%)	8(32%)	280
	Daughter	1 (13%)	1(6%)	12 (11%)	4(5%)	5(14%)	4(16%)	
	Equal Preference	2(25%)	5(31%)	34 (30%)	31(38%)	15(41%)	13(52%)	
Which of the sexes do you prefer most?	Boy	6(75%)	5(31%)	97(86%)	52(64%)	21(57%)	14(56%)	280
	Girl	2(25%)	11(69%)	16(14%)	29(36%)	16(43%)	11(44%)	
How relevant are the determinants of gender preference today?	Still relevant	5(63%)	9(54%)	69(61%)	41(51%)	14(37%)	8(31%)	280
	Loosing relevance	2(28%)	6(40%)	37(33%)	35(43%)	21(56%)	15(60%)	
	Not relevance	1(9%)	1(6%)	7(6%)	5(6%)	2(7%)	2(10%)	

Source: Field Work 2016.

Educational status in this study is grouped into three categories: those without formal education, those with middle level education (i.e those with either primary and secondary education or both) while the last group is the tertiary education (these are basically those who have post secondary school qualifications like NCE, Polytechnic and university qualifications). From this group of respondents, when all the sex composition of living children are all males majority of the respondents, irrespective of their educational statuses would not want to have more children – 6(75%) men, 11(69%) women with no formal education; while 90(80%)men, 50(62%) women from middle education group; and 34(92%) men and 13(52%) women from the tertiary education category also aligned with this intention. Whereas if the sex composition of all the living children are females, most respondents, which cut across educational categories, strongly desire to have more children – 7(88%) men and 13(81%) women with no formal education; 107(95%) men and 72(89%) women with middle education; 25(68%) men and 17 (68%) women with tertiary education would continue to bear children until their desire is met. The prime preference for male child is mostly reported by respondents with no formal education and middle education respectively: 5(63%) men and 10(63%) women with no formal education; 67(59%) men and 46(57%) women with middle education. But the preference for a male child among those with tertiary education is not that pronounced especially amongst women in this group: 17(46%) men and 8(32%) women respectively. Another look at the respondents with tertiary education responses to most preferred sex, they also reported a little average preference against the females: 21(57%) men and 14(56%)women. Beside, most respondents from this category submitted that the socio- determinants of sex preference are gradually losing its importance in our society today.

Discussion of Questionnaire

Obviously patriarchy is still at play among the study population as most respondents preferred having a male child as their first child.

We observed that women respondents from the urban center indicated their preference for a female child. This is instructive because the role of female child in contemporary societies is becoming more important and valuable. This may have informed the steady trend towards equal preference for both sexes among urban residents. Comparatively, this development in the rural areas is not significantly pronounced or observable in the rural areas. It is safe to say here that rurality is close to nature and as such cultural the practices of the people are believe/regarded to be inviolable and to that extent immutable.

Similarly, vein most respondents reported that they would not want to have more children when the sex compositions of their living children are males. Invariably, most respondents also reported that they intend

to have more children if their desired numbers of children are all females. While it is safe to say that the determinants of male preference are gradually losing their importance, but most respondents expressed the view that these determinants are still relevant. Like we did state in this study, most part of the study population is largely rural except communities in the local government. Therefore it's not unexpected that most respondents still expressed the relevance of these determinants to gender preference. For instance issues/matters that have to do with religious rituals, inheritance and succession, burials rite etc will place the male children at center stage while the females play subordinated and perhaps supportive roles.

In another development, we observed that education have not significantly altered the perception of the study population on male preference. From the cross tabulation of gender and education, we observed that the preference for male is still an integral part of their social existence. However while its observable among respondents (both males and females) with tertiary education that they have equal preference for both sexes such preference could be subtle and circumstantial. The question is: at what point and under what conditions could both sexes be given same preference?

Interview sessions:

Interview session with male respondents

Most of the male respondents, during the interview sessions, do not intend to have more children when the sex compositions of their living children are boys. A male respondent, with tertiary education, in his comment noted that: ***if by providence all the children are I wanted in life are boys, I am satisfied because I don't know if I push further for a girl I may end up having another boy.***

Similarly most male respondents with middle education also reported that the expectation of every marriage is to have male children who represent the symbol and authority of every family. One of such male respondents noted that: ***every family desire, at least, is to have a male child for the continuity of the family and inheritance purposes... and such expectation continues until such a male child arrives in the family.***

On the other hand, some other male respondents mainly urban residents believed that they may take the risk of looking for, at least, a girl in order to satisfy the sex composition of their living children. One of such views was expressed by an urban resident with tertiary education:

The desire and relevance of having, at least a female child is becoming more pronounced in most families today. This is because the role of female children in an emerging society like cannot be overemphasized.... they are becoming more relevant in the socio-economic development of their respective families and communities at large.

In another development, most respondents across the educational divides reported that they intend to have more children even beyond their original intention when their living children sex compositions are all females. The following comments represent this view. A respondent with middle education reasoned that:

A family without a male child is like a house without a roof...such family is not secured culturally and economically cos whatever effort they make on earth could be transcribed to another with a male child.

Supporting the above view, another respondent with middle education noted that:

When a man gives birth to three consecutive female children and the fourth child is yet another baby girl, such occurrence brings apprehension, disappointment, and a sense of failure in the family.

Another male respondent remarked that: A careful examination of most polygamous home today is occasioned by the need to have a male child. When you take count of the sex composition of such family you may discover that the last child or last few children are probably males. At this development procreation would probably stop.

Interview sessions with female respondents

Most of the women in urban center reported the need to have, at least a baby girl, even when their desire number of children are met. This is the dominant view expressed among females respondents with tertiary education. One of them believed that:

A family without a girl child is not complete in all ramifications because female children are personification of compassion and love. They will empathize with you especially during period of crisis.... Though male children also sympathize with parents but theirs are mainly assistance in the form of financial assistance to parents..

Yet another female respondent in this group opined that:

You will most appreciate female children especially when parents are ageing. They are constantly concerned about the well being of their parents especially at old age: they will call,

visit regularly, buy medications, even come to spend time to give warmth to their parents.... This care and support are rare among male children.

There are divergent views from female respondents when they were asked if all their living children are females if they desire to have more in other to born a male child. Some female respondents with tertiary education will not want to go beyond their desired number of children even when their living children are girls. For one female respondent with tertiary education she retorted thus:

so be it, if all my children are females. Children are gifts from God. I cannot manufacture one to meet up with the requirement of my culture. Remember that giving birth to a male child is principally dependent on the Y chromosome of the man. But most men do not know this or may not want to hear about it.

But for most female respondents, with middle education, the necessity to have at least a male child is informed by the need to conscientiously be an integral member and a socially fulfilled woman in their community. One female respondent in this category has this to say:
The truth of the matter is that we are entangled by the culture of patriarchy. Hence a woman can only secure her home and have a stake in the comity of women in her community only if she produces a male child for her husband.

Yet another one remarked that:*The need for male children is an unavoidable necessity in every culture... It is very important if a woman must be relevant in her marriage.*

Generally most respondents identified some socio-cultural determinants of male child preference among which are inheritance reasons, the need for family continuity, religious rituals and ancestral worship. They contended that these are some of the challenges facing efforts toward equal preference. A female respondents with tertiary education remarked that:

In a patriarchal society like ours, where the voices of men are heard and the faces of women are only seen, its very difficult to have a equal preference for both sexes..... it is the social condition at every given time that influences the preference for a particular sex.

This means that the preference for a particular sex is not universal in the study population or uniform rather the particular context or situation at which preference for a male or female is considered influences the choice at that point.

Nonetheless, some women respondents reported that the relevance and predominance of these cultural determinants are waning and to that extent losing their relative importance in a knowledge- driven world where success and fulfillment is measured by ones personal effort rather than inherited parental wealth.

In the light of the above, some women respondents eulogized the roles and efforts made by some women nowadays to prominence and recognition. A female respondent with tertiary education observed that:
In the recent time, female children are becoming more educated and empowered. As a result, they now take the centre stage in the socio-economic development of their communities....they no longer play subordinated that would allow their culture and traditions guide and control their actions.

Supporting this view, another female respondent with tertiary education remarked thus:
Females are now found in highly placed positions, with high esteem competing and complementing with their male colleagues..... They now create their own wealth. The issue of inheritance of property from their parents or husband is no long fashionable. Rather they make meaningful contribution to the family patrimony whether as a daughter or wife.

For yet another female, she opined that:
Do you know it is now safer to keep the family wealth in the custody of female children because recent development have shown that leaving the family patrimony in the hands (alone to) of the first son he will abuse it. When probed further this responded remarked that most families today are entangled with crises because of the problem of primogeniture and greed among male inheritors who failed to accommodate the rest of their siblings and manage the personal estate of their parents.

Interview sessions for rural respondents.

There are seemed to be ambiguity from our respondents in the rural areas about the preference for a particular sex to another. To some rural interviewees, every child whether male or female is a preferred child to the parents. But preferring one to another is dependent on what is being considered and who is being considered for that purpose. For a rural male respondent with middle education, he observed that:

When it comes to inheritance or family religious rituals male children are mostly preferred. But daughters are mostly valued and appreciated when it comes to giving them out in marriage and caring for parents especially at old age. During social ceremonies they are always around to give their support and attention.

Attesting to the above a rural female respondent believed that:

When a daughter is to be given out in marriage the suitor would foot the bills for the marriage expenses including the renovation of the inlaw's house. This is a development to the girls family as compared to when your son is going to marry wherein you spend a fortune for the marriage rites and ceremony. In this case who is depleting the family's wealth? He queried!

Another female respondent reported that:

One common trend in our community today is the gradual exodus of young boys to urban centers, after their middle school education. The implication is that the female children who are mostly domiciled at home waiting for a suitor to engage them in marriage, are the ones left to help their parents in the farm and/ or markets.

Most rural respondents (both men and women) reported that when their desired numbers of children are all boys, they do not intend to have more. While a negligible number, mainly women noted that they still desire to have at least a daughter because at old age the attention and warmth from female children become very imperative. Whereas for the male children, they are mostly concerned with providing money for parents to meet the needful. Some comments from a widow with middle education corroborate these views:

We are two surviving children of my mother: my elder brother and I. for the past nine years, my elder brother who lives in Warri have not seen my mother. Our culture is not complaining about this now. But when she finally answer the call of God the son becomes relevant and I will be required to contribute to funerals and also perform certain burial rites. During this time no one remembers the effort I made to care for my mother. This is incredible and of course an aberration!

Furthermore, most respondents interviewed would not prefer having daughters alone as their living children. In the words of a male respondent: *It is very risky and dangerous decision because at the death of that man, his name remains lost forever. He would have lived a wasted life.* To another male respondent from the rural area: *I do not feel complete and successful.* Another male respondent, (rural) queried thus: *who will bury me at death? My daughters that I have given out in marriage.....?*

Comments from females in the rural areas indicated similar views from their men counterpart. For one female interviewee: It makes me unsecured and apprehensive in my marriage. For yet another female respondent: *It is a social stigma having no male child. You feel a sense of rejection and humiliation in your community.*

Generally, all the respondents also identified inheritance religious rituals and family continuity as some factors influencing male child preference.

However, it is the belief of most rural respondents, also that these social and cultural determinants of male child preference are not as important in the consideration of gender preference as at today. One of them remarked that: Ancestral worship is decreasing, women/female now create their property through their various productive roles as farmers, traders, artisans and the likes. She emphatically remarked that: during ceremonials whether social or religious, women roles are very visible and relevant nowadays.

IV. FINDINGS

From this data of this study the followings were observed:

- The phenomenon of male preference is still gaining wide acceptance in the study population. Evidently the various responses from respondents from both the questionnaire and interview sessions indicate that the males continue to gain prominent preference.
- However, from the study there is a steady progress towards equal preference among urban residents with tertiary education. Though this trend is slow, it is an effort towards changing the original held perception of females in the study population.
- It is also the view of this study that the preference for female children is a selective and conditional form of preference. At one point a female child becomes relevant and becomes the bride of the house but at another point when she is not beneficial to the circumstance under consideration she becomes the subordinated sex.
- The fact that preference for females is being selective among the study population, this study submits that the steady preference for females **Instrumental Preference**. The Instrumental Preference comes at play when there are fundamental benefits and tremendous advantages that could be derived from female children in some contextual circumstances at given times. In such situations the females are most preferred.
- We also found that there are no immutable laws governing preference for a particular sex. Some socio-cultural considerations and the urge to accumulate wealth for male dynasty of another generation are some of the major albatross toward fair and justified gender preference.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of this discourse we recommend that:

- A holistic reorientation of custodians of the customs and tradition of the study population. This reorientation should be targeted at critical stakeholders like the traditional rulers, priests, chiefs, community leaders, women opinion leaders.
- The education of the minds and empowerment of the girl child is a paramount factor toward changing the perception of the female children.
- Relevant legislation of laws to re-examine the culture of patriarchy so that those laws which adversely affect fundamental human rights should be abrogated. Such laws should not be left to die on arrival but they must be enforced.

VI. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it is our belief that preference for a particular child or sex should be at the whims and caprices of the individuals. Everyone is at liberty to prefer one sex to another. Even within the same sex there are preferences. But what may not be palatable and plausible is when such actions are guided by the custom and tradition of the land so that they perpetually and consistently become our reference points. It is on this note I want to end this study with an excerpt from Mabeiam (2012) “... *Every child is a gift from God and when we scorn His gift we stand condemned. People are just people irrespective of gender and our God given abilities are not distributed based on gender ... But the emphasis of male children over the females has led to complacency by most male children when compared to female children. We must remember that life is not a huge running battle between both sexes. We co-exist because one cannot do without the other....*”

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