

Exploring the Impact of Son Preference on the Well-being of Daughters in Tanzania: A Multifaceted Analysis

Elinami Nasari^{1, *}, Rehema J. Magesa²

¹Assistant, Lecturer Tengeru Institute of Community Development, Gender and Development Department, P.O Box 1006, Arusha, Tanzania.

²Senior Lecturer Tengeru Institute of Community Development, Gender and Development Department, P.O Box 1006, Arusha, Tanzania.

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Abstract:

In Tanzania, entrenched cultural norms favoring male offspring significantly influence family dynamics and pose considerable challenges to the well-being of daughters. This phenomenon, known as son preference, manifests in biased resource allocation, limited educational opportunities, and distinct healthcare differentials. This study delves into the multifaceted consequences of son preference on Tanzanian daughters, particularly in the Arusha Region. The cultural roots of son preference in Tanzania can be traced to historical and societal norms, where male heirs are traditionally viewed as primary caretakers and providers for aging parents. This mindset leads to biased resource allocation, impacting daughters' access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and nutrition. Educational disparities are particularly pronounced, limiting girls' prospects and perpetuating gender-based inequalities in the workforce. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. It adopts a descriptive survey design, conducted in all seven district councils of Arusha Region. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques are applied to select respondents, encompassing young women, girls, and stakeholders from various organizations. Results indicate a prevalent acknowledgment of son preference, particularly in pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. The study reveals how son preference affects education, health, and economic opportunities for daughters. Educational disparities, early marriage, unequal access to health care, and limited economic prospects are identified consequences. To address these challenges, the study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach involving changes in societal attitudes, policies promoting gender equality, and initiatives to empower girls. By challenging ingrained cultural norms, fostering educational opportunities, and ensuring equal access to healthcare, Tanzania can work towards dismantling barriers hindering the potential of its daughters. The study contributes to the discourse on gender equality, advocating for interventions that ensure the holistic development and flourishing of Tanzanian daughters.

Key words: Son, Son Preference, Daughters, Gender equality, Societal norms

Background:

In Tanzania, as in many societies worldwide, cultural norms and traditional beliefs often play a significant role in shaping family dynamics. One such deeply ingrained phenomenon is the preference for male offspring, a practice that has far-reaching consequences for the well-being of daughters. This preference manifests in various forms, from biased resource allocation to limited educational opportunities for girls, ultimately influencing their physical, emotional, and social development. As in Tanzania, preference for sons, or for more sons than daughters, has been documented in several countries in the world. Preference for male children is especially prevalent in South Asia, East Asia and North Africa; while in many European and Latin American countries, a balanced sex composition of children is more commonly preferred (Gilany and Shady, 2007).

The cultural preference for sons in Tanzania is rooted in historical and societal norms, where male heirs are traditionally seen as primary caretakers and providers for aging parents. This mindset has implications for the status and treatment of daughters within families, impacting their access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and nutrition. The consequences of son preference extend beyond the familial sphere, influencing broader social and economic structures, as well as perpetuating gender inequalities. This practice denies the girl child good health, education, recreation, economic opportunity and the right to choose her partner, violating her rights under articles 2, 6, 12, 19, 24, 27 and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1979)

Educational disparities between sons and daughters are particularly pronounced in Tanzania, with societal expectations often limiting girls' access to quality education. Limited educational opportunities contribute to a cycle of disadvantage for daughters, affecting their employment prospects and perpetuating gender-based inequalities in the workforce (World Bank, 2018). Moreover, the preference for sons can lead to early marriages for girls, further restricting their

autonomy and exposing them to health risks associated with early childbirth.

Healthcare differentials also emerge as a consequence of son preference, as families may prioritize the health needs of male children over their female counterparts. This biased allocation of resources can result in compromised physical well-being for daughters, exacerbating existing health disparities (Kien and Nguyen, 2022). Additionally, the socio-cultural expectations surrounding gender roles may restrict girls' involvement in decision-making processes, hindering their ability to advocate for their own health and well-being.

Addressing the effects of son preference on the well-being of daughters in Tanzania and specifically in Arusha Region requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing changes in societal attitudes, policies promoting gender equality, and initiatives to empower girls. By challenging ingrained cultural norms, fostering educational opportunities for girls, and promoting equal access to healthcare, Tanzania can work towards dismantling the barriers that hinder the well-being and potential of its daughters. This exploration seeks to delve deeper into the nuanced effects of son preference on daughters in Tanzania, shedding light on the need for comprehensive interventions to break the cycle of gender-based disparities and ensure a brighter future for all children.

Statement of Problem:

Despite the strides made in gender equality worldwide, Tanzania continues to grapple with the pervasive issue of son preference, a deeply rooted cultural phenomenon that significantly impacts the well-being of daughters. This preference for male offspring is entrenched in societal norms and historical practices, influencing resource allocation, educational opportunities, and access to healthcare. The resulting gender disparities perpetuate a cycle of inequality, hindering the overall development and potential of daughters in Tanzanian communities.

The problem at hand is multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions of the well-being of daughters.

Educational inequalities persist as girls face limited access to quality education, impeding their personal growth and future prospects. Additionally, biased resource allocation within families often leaves daughters at a disadvantage concerning healthcare and nutrition, jeopardizing their physical well-being. The social and economic repercussions of son preference further compound these challenges, creating a systemic barrier to the empowerment of girls in Tanzania.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the intricate layers of the impact of son preference on the well-being of daughters in Tanzania. By identifying and understanding the specific challenges faced by girls in the context of cultural preferences for male heirs, we can inform targeted interventions and policy initiatives that seek to dismantle these barriers. In doing so, we aspire to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and advocate for positive change that ensures the holistic development and flourishing of Tanzanian daughters.

Methodology:

The study used mixed method approach. This means the study employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The importance of using mixed method in this study was to enable the researcher to answer questions with both open and closed ended questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions.

It further applied a descriptive survey design. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) explain that a descriptive survey design is utilized to obtain information regarding the current situation about a phenomenon to describe what exists, with respect to variables or conditions in a situation. This design the relationship and practices that exist, beliefs and processes that are on-going, effects that are felt and trends which are developed. The study adopted the design to provide an analysis and explanation of views and comment about child sexual abuse. This design was considered appropriate since it enabled the researcher to collection data with less manipulation of variables.

The study was conducted in Arusha Region. The region was selected on the assumption that it is among the main sending and receiving areas from which men, women and children are supposedly trafficked to various cities in the country and Arusha in particular for labour and sex trade. Arusha region is a global tourist destination and is the center of the Northern Tanzania safari circuit. The national parks and reserves in this region include Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Arusha National Park, the Loliondo Game Controlled Area and part of Lake Manyara National Park. Remains of 600-year-old stone structures are found in Engaruka, just off the dirt road between *Mto wa Mbu* and Lake Natron. With Human Development Index of 0.721, Arusha is among the most developed region in Tanzania. The study was conducted in all seven district councils of Arusha namely; Monduli, Meru, Arusha City, Karatu, Ngorongoro, Arusha rural and Longido district councils

The study applied both probability and non-probability sampling to select the respondents. In Non-probability sampling, purposive sampling method was used to select the study area and the districts since the study was intended to be conducted in Arusha region hence all the district councils were involved. The wards where the study was to be conducted were also selected using a purposive sampling method. A total of 15 wards, 2 from each district were selected for this study except for Arusha City where three wards were involved. Factors considered while selecting the wards was the proximity from the district headquarters and the number of young women and girls as compared to other wards. All the selected wards had a big number of young women and girls and were close to the district headquarters. Apart from that, convenience sampling as a form of non-probability sampling was applied to select staff from community development office, ward office, police, immigration and social welfare office; and other stakeholders from non-governmental organizations including those from faith-based organizations and non-governmental organizations. In probability sampling technique a simple random sampling technique was applied in

obtaining respondents who in a way have been affected by trafficking. Apart from the respondents, this method was used to select respondents from the community who were willing to participate in the study. The respondents from the community participated in focus group discussions.

In determining the sample size of the study, three criteria were considered which included the level of precision, level of confidence and degree of variability. In minimizing the sampling error and biasness the study used a 5% level of precision and a 95% level of confidence. The study population considered was for young women and girls from the age of 15 to 24 years and other stakeholders from different organizations, the Government and the community. The population for women according to NBS (2013) is 189,678. Therefore the formula for calculating the sample size was adapted from Cochran (1977), from this formula a sample of 400 was selected for the study.

Despite the small sample size for qualitative data, this approach was able to provide rich data even with small sample which complemented the quantitative data collected for the study. The study had 5 face to face interviews and 10 key informant interviews making a total of 15 respondents.

The parallel data collection design:

In conducting a parallel design the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process, weighed the methods equally, analyzed two components independently, and interpreted the results together (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). With the purpose of corroboration and validation, the researcher aimed to triangulate the methods by directly comparing the quantitative statistical results and qualitative findings. In the research process, two datasets were obtained, analyzed separately, and compared. That means that both qualitative and quantitative data was collected at the same time. The purpose of collecting qualitative and quantitative data at the same time was to enrich and triangulate the information collected (Magesa, 2021).

Primary data collection method:

As earlier on mentioned, both qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed for this study.

Qualitative methods encompassed face to face interviews, key informant interviews; focus group discussions and observations while for quantitative information the data collection tool utilized was the questionnaire.

Secondary data collection method:

The research incorporated secondary data, sourced from a variety of literature and statistical reviews at both national and international levels. Primarily, documentary analysis was employed as a complementary approach to the primary data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The purpose behind scrutinizing diverse documents, including laws, policies, and strategies, was twofold: first, to establish the contextual background for the investigated problem, and second, to identify any empirical, methodological, or theoretical gaps in existing research.

Secondary research methods encompassed the utilization of data available on the internet, data sourced from government and non-government agencies, data retrieved from educational institutions such as University repositories, and information gathered from e-libraries. A range of documents significantly contributed to this study, including published works on son preference both within and outside the country, as well as reports and documents accessible from NGOs and other institutions. To ensure a comprehensive approach, a set of questions was developed to guide the collection of additional information, systematically addressing all aspects of the study's inquiries.

Data Analysis techniques:

The filled in questionnaires were edited for consistency and subjected to proper recording. The information was then punched into the computer using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative information was transcribed. As such a complete script was produced for each focus group discussion or interviews conducted. For quantitative data both descriptive and inferential analyses were done using SPSS (Version 20) computer programme. Descriptive statistical analysis employed frequencies, percentage, mean and measures of variations. For qualitative data, content analysis was used involving thematic exploration (based on words,

concepts, literary devices, and nonverbal cues) and exploration of the interconnections among themes.

Results and discussion:

Demographic characteristics of respondents:

Demographic characteristics considered in this study were age, level of education, place of originality, occupation of the parent and family size of the respondents.

Age of respondents:

The participants in this research varied in age, spanning from 10 to 24 years. Nevertheless, for the purpose of analysis, three distinct age groups were identified, as illustrated in Table 1. The largest proportion of respondents (71.2%) fell within the age range of 20 to 24 years. Following this, the age group of 15 to 19 years constituted 28.2%, while the 10 to 14 years age category represented a minimal percentage, accounting for only 0.5%.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by age group (n=400)

Age group (years)	Frequency	Percent
10 - 14	2	0.5
15 - 19	113	28.3
20 - 24	285	71.2
Total	400	100.0

Marital status

From Table 2, it is evident that 43.8% of the participants indicated that they had experienced marriage, while 56.2% reported never having been married. Interestingly, among those who claimed to have been married previously, a considerable portion expressed that the marriage did not actually exist.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by marital status (n=400)

Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Have been married before	175	43.8
Have never been married	225	56.2
Total	400	100.0

Education level of the respondents

Table 3 reveals that a good number of respondents (74%) had primary education, while those who had secondary education accounted for 12.5% which was equivalent to respondents who had never gone to school who accounted for 12%. Very few respondents (1.5%) had tertiary education. The standard deviation as regards to number of years in schooling was 0.55. That indicates that the level of education among the young women and girls were almost the same as the majority had attained primary education. It is important to understand the educational level of the individuals in the community as it might influence their wellbeing as well as their decision to be trafficked.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents by education level (n=400)

Education level	Frequency	Percent
Primary	296	74.0
Secondary	50	12.5
Adult education	48	12.0
Tertiary	6	1.5
Total	400	100.0

Son preference

The participants expressed concern about son preference, with a substantial majority (83%) acknowledging its presence. Worldwide, studies on sex preference commonly reveal a higher prevalence of son preference compared to daughter preference. For instance, data from the World Fertility Survey identified only Jamaica and Venezuela as countries where an overall preference for daughters was observed, while fourteen nations demonstrated a strong or moderate preference for sons (Cronk, 1991, 2008). In regions where son preference is prevalent, girls often face neglect and, in some cases, are subjected to human trafficking for exploitative purposes. In alignment with this pattern, the findings of this study echoed a similar sentiment, with 83% of respondents reporting the existence of son preference within their households (Magesa 2021, 2023).

Respondents hailing from Maasai and Iraqw backgrounds shared insights into their cultural practices, revealing that within their traditions, the birth of a boy brings immense joy to the father, often marked by the celebratory slaughtering of a cow or goat. In contrast, when a girl is born, the father's happiness is comparatively subdued. The upbringing of a boy typically involves preferential treatment, while girls are instilled with values of respecting their brothers regardless of age. Through discussions, it was generally observed that in tribes such as Maasai, Iraqw, Nyaturu, Nyiramba, and Meru, sons are highly esteemed, receiving valuable resources, including education and inheritance, according to the parents' capabilities. Conversely, daughters receive less respect and are groomed primarily for their roles as good wives and mothers. Inheritance is not extended to them, and if fortunate, they might receive educational opportunities provided by their parents (Magesa 2021, 2023). The sentiments expressed in a face-to-face interview encapsulate this cultural dynamic

“Upon finishing my primary education, I found myself compelled to remain at home while my younger brothers proceeded with their schooling. Unlike my brothers, none of whom had to pause their education after primary school, I faced a common village practice where girls, upon completing primary education, typically await marriage without further educational pursuits. Despite having the aspiration of becoming a lawyer, I took the initiative to run away in search of employment to fund my education. Regrettably, I have yet to achieve this goal, but I remain optimistic that one day I will fulfill my dream”.

Son preference was also mentioned as a push factors for the girls to run away from home, as they felt they needed to empower themselves economically away from their parents by finding job.

Specifically the respondents reported that son preference had a major effect on education, health and economic status of the girls in these communities.

Effect of son preference on education of the daughter:

The effect of son preference on the education of girls is a significant and concerning aspect of gender inequality. Son preference can influence educational opportunities for girls in various ways, contributing to disparities in access, retention, and the overall quality of education. Table 4 reveals how the respondents explained son preference affected the education of girls in the community.

Table 4: How son preference affect education of the daughter (n=400)

		Frequency	Percentage
1	Limited Access to Education	274	69
2	Early Withdrawal from School	306	77
3	Educational Neglect and Resource Allocation:	89	22
4	Pressure for Early Marriage	387	97
5	Gender-Based Discrimination in Schools	97	24
6	Lower Investment in Higher Education	116	29

From Table 4 it was shows how son preference affect education of the daughter. These are discussed further below;

Limited Access to Education:

Sixty nine percent of respondents reported that son preference often leads to limited access to education for girls, as families may prioritize investing in the education of their male offspring. This bias can result in fewer opportunities for girls to attend school, especially in communities where cultural norms favor boys' education. Studies have shown that in settings where son preference is strong, girls may receive less investment in

education and have lower school enrollment rates compared to boys. This can be attributed to traditional views on gender roles that prioritize the education of sons and may lead to a gender gap in educational achievements. In Turkey, for instance, conservative views on gender roles have been identified as a significant barrier to girls' education, with a substantial gender gap in education to the detriment of girls still existing (Caner et al, 2015)

Early Withdrawal from School:

Early withdrawal was also mentioned by a number of respondents (77%). They revealed that in communities with strong son preference, girls may be withdrawn from school at an early age. Families may perceive investing in a daughter's education as less valuable, especially if they anticipate her primary role as being a wife and mother rather than pursuing a career or higher education. This has been reported in Maasai community as well as Iraqw communities. They withdraw girls from primary and secondary schools for different reasons including marriage, help in household chores and the parents feels its wastage of family money. These findings relate with other findings worldwide which confirms that girls withdraw from primary and secondary education in a higher rate as compared to boys. A study conducted in Nepal states that girls' school dropout is high as the girls start primary school in greater numbers, the rate at which they leave school is very high (Adhikari, 2013).

Pressure for Early Marriage:

Son preference can contribute to societal pressures for early marriages for girls. Families may prioritize marrying off their daughters at a young age, viewing marriage as a primary role for girls rather than pursuing educational opportunities. Son preference can lead to early marriage for girls, as parents may seek to ensure the economic and social security of their daughters through marriage, often at the expense of their education and personal development. Early marriage can result in girls having less autonomy, making them more vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse, and limiting their ability to make critical decisions about their own and their children education. The

practice of early marriage is linked to lower educational attainment for children, particularly in communities with a high prevalence of early marriage.

Effect of son preference on Health of the daughter:

Son preference, which is the cultural or societal preference for male children over female children, can have various impacts on the health and well-being of daughters. This preference is often associated with gender bias and discrimination, and its effects can manifest in several ways. Table 5 reveals how the respondents explained son preference affected the health of girls in the community.

Table 5: How son preference affect health of the daughter (n=400)

	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Unequal Access to Healthcare	212	53
2	Nutritional Disparities	113	29
3	Limited Reproductive Health Education	276	69
4	Early Marriage and Childbearing	87	22
5	Higher Risk of Gender-Based Violence	178	45
6	Lack of Control Over Reproductive Choices	54	14

From Table 5 it shows how son preference affects education of the daughter. The effect of son preference on the health of daughters is a critical dimension of gender-based disparities, encompassing various aspects of physical, mental, and reproductive well-being. A good number of respondents (69%) revealed that son preference has effect on limited health education while unequal

access to healthcare was mentioned by 53% of the respondents.

Unequal Access to Healthcare:

In communities with a strong preference for sons, daughters may experience unequal access to healthcare resources. Families may prioritize the health needs of male offspring, leading to delayed or inadequate medical attention for girls. This can result in untreated illnesses and compromised health outcomes. In studies conducted worldwide this has been an issue as daughters have been denied some of beneficial health resources for their survival. In Kien and Nguyen (2022) it has been reported that with sophisticated statistical approaches and detailed micro-data, several studies have shown that parents with a preference for sons discriminate against daughters when they distribute scarce resources such as breast milk, sources of vitamin and protein, health care, and time spending (Jayachandran & Kuziemko, 2011; Barcellos et al., 2014; Baker & Milligan, 2016; Aurino, 2017).

Limited Reproductive Health Education:

Societal norms influenced by son preference may contribute to limited reproductive health education for girls. In communities where girls are primarily expected to assume domestic roles, there may be insufficient information and awareness about reproductive health, family planning, and related matters. This gender bias can manifest in various ways, including inadequate access to information about reproductive health for girls and women. Families may prioritize the reproductive health education of their sons over daughters, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and leaving female members of the community at a disadvantage. The consequences are profound, as daughters may face heightened risks of unintended pregnancies, limited knowledge about contraceptive methods, and insufficient support during pregnancy and childbirth. Additionally, the cultural preference for sons may contribute to the neglect of daughters' overall well-being, hindering their ability to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. To address this issue, it is crucial to challenge and transform cultural norms, promoting gender equality and ensuring that

comprehensive reproductive health education is accessible to all, regardless of gender. This approach not only empowers women but also fosters healthier communities by breaking down barriers to knowledge and promoting informed choices for all individuals.

The effect of son preference on the economic well-being of daughters:

The effect of son preference on the economic well-being of daughters is a complex issue with multifaceted consequences. The respondents mentioned limited educational and professional opportunities, gender wage gap, economic dependence on male relatives, limited inheritance rights as economic effects of son preference.

For the case of limited Educational and Professional Opportunities the respondents mentioned that in their communities which are mainly pastoralist and agro pastoralists' daughters may face limited access to education and professional opportunities. Families may prioritize investing in the education and career development of sons, potentially resulting in fewer economic prospects for daughters. Adding on that the respondents revealed that societal norms influenced by son preference can contribute to a gender wage gap. Daughters may face discrimination in the job market, receiving lower wages compared to their male counterparts. This economic disparity can affect their financial independence and long-term economic well-being.

Discussion:

Son preference was acknowledged by a good number of respondents, a sentiment particularly prevalent among those hailing from pastoralist and agro-pastoralist backgrounds. The discussion highlighted a prevailing pattern in communities like the Maasai and Iraqw, where a son is esteemed and valued, receiving support including education and inheritance according to the family's capacity. In contrast, daughters in these communities receive less respect and are predominantly groomed to fulfill the roles of a good wife and mother. Furthermore, daughters are often considered as

belonging to another family, as they are expected to be married off into different households.

Under these circumstances, girls do not receive the same level of care and attention as their male counterparts. Economically, daughters are viewed as assets for the family, contributing to the dowry received upon their marriage. In pastoralist families, this dowry can vary widely, ranging from 30 cattle to 300 or more for a young female. Some girls are compelled to marry at a young age, primarily to generate income through dowry, which is subsequently utilized by their brothers to facilitate their own marriages. The phenomenon of son preference has been observed globally, cutting across various communities irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds.

Take India as an illustration, where the issue is attributed to innumerable of social, cultural, and economic factors. In this context, a boy is commonly perceived as an asset, a prospective provider and caregiver who will support his parents in their old age. Conversely, a girl is often considered a liability, as parents frequently face societal pressure to pay dowries when their daughters marry (DW, 2019). Following marriage, a daughter is typically seen as an integral part of her husband's household and is generally anticipated to care for her in-laws rather than her own parents

Masculinity and Son Preference in Nepal and Vietnam revealed that parents preferred sons over their daughters for varying reasons. They stated that “it is important to have a son to carry on the lineage or family name, it is important to have a son to take care of you in your old age, fathering a male child shows you are a real man and having a daughter is financial burden or loss”. The reasons for son preference mentioned in the above studies were reported to discriminate against females and as a result the girls escaped to fend for their future since they could not get this from their families (Nanda *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the pervasive cultural preference for sons has profound and multifaceted effects on the

well-being of daughters in numerous societies, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. The implications of son preference are evident across various aspects of life, encompassing education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and social dynamics. In addressing the effects of son preference on the well-being of daughters, it is imperative to engage in comprehensive efforts that challenge deep-rooted cultural norms, advocate for gender equality, and promote policies that empower and protect the rights of daughters. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable society, we can break the cycle of gender-based disparities and create an environment where the well-being and potential of daughters are valued and prioritized. Ultimately, the path to positive change lies in collaborative efforts that span cultural, educational, and policy domains, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all.

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