

# Influence of Male Child Syndrome on the Psychological Adjustment of Females and Female Producing Women in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of females and female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population that was used for the study was the entire single and married female gender in Jalingo Local Government Area. The sample for the study which comprised ninety (90) females and ninety (90) female producing women making 180 respondents altogether were randomly selected from educational centers, recreational centers, as well as a market within the Local Government Area. The instrument that was used for data collection was a self-designed instrument titled "Male Child Syndrome and Female social Adjustment Questionnaire (MSFPAQ)". Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to determine the reliability coefficient. The reliability result of .996 shows that the instrument was reliable for data collection. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings showed that male child syndrome negatively influences the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area. Also, male child syndrome affects the development of low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area. The researchers recommended among others that Community leaders and traditional heads should sound warning members to abolish the perception that women who are not giving birth to male children should be treated badly. This is because every child is a gift that needs to be celebrated irrespective of gender. Also, the government should provide job opportunities for women giving birth to female children only to give them a financial boost that will enhance them to provide for the basic needs of the female children and also train the children up educationally.

**Keywords:** Male Child Syndrome, Psychological Adjustment, of Females, and Female Producing Women

## Introduction

Male-child syndrome has remained one of the most lasting cultural values among the people in Nigeria. This phenomenon is evident in societies where male children are accorded special recognition and or higher status relative to their female children (Akpan 2015; Nwokocha, 2015). In communities where such gender distinction is a norm, male children are perceived as sustainers of lineage, holders of central, and often, most important positions of authority, and inheritors of immovable properties. According to Isiugo-Abanihe (2013), the Nigerian people with very few exceptions are matrilineal and attach strong significance to a male-determined and dominated structure.

Male child syndrome has been widely observed around the globe. There is a preference for children, particularly a preference for sons. Thus, Lundberg (2015), reports that child preference has been documented in many reports and studies in less developed countries in South Asia, East Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. He went on to say that parental sex preference is also evident in developed countries, such as in the U.S, and Western Europe where individuals tend to have a preference for at least one child of each sex. The emphasis here is that parental sex preference is a global phenomenon. It may affect children adversely and hence the entire society (Lundberg, 2015)

Coleman (2007) agreed that children who are low preferred tend to be less emotionally stable than those who are highly preferred. He added that such children become emotionally upset, perhaps tearful, or angry when confronted with stressful situations while those highly preferred children can handle with greater emotional equanimity. Werner (2004) adds that as a result the lowly preferred has poor social interpersonal relationship; they consider the nature of human existence as being untrustworthy hostile, unfriendly ,

emotionally unsafe, threatening, or dangerous. He further added that such children often construct mental images of personal relationships as being unpredictable, untrustworthy, and perhaps hurtful. For these reasons, they may find it difficult to interact effectively with their parents.

Morgan, Lye, and Codran (1999) expressed concern that preference may have a more negative emotional effect on boys than on girls because they need a father effect. They affirmed that mothers reported greater emotional attachment of their husbands to sons than their daughters. They further believe that fathers have a special role to play in the emotional and social interaction of boys. Coleman, (2007), observed that fathers did not differ significantly from mothers in terms of overall parental involvement, intimacy, and parenting skills, both are more interactive and enforce rules more strictly. Risi, Gerhardstein, and Kestner (2003) opined that lowly preferred children tend to assign a higher value to goals of retaliation and dominance and to value social affiliation and interaction goals less. He further explained that the lowly preferred are withdrawn and also tend to give higher ratings to self-protection and appearance of strength, and give lower ratings to social interaction and constructive problem solving with their parents. Morgan, Lye, and Condran (1999), state that prior conflicts with parents can lead children to misperceive the causes of problems in subsequent social interactions with their parents. They assured that as children become more physiologically aroused in response to provocations, they have an accompanying increase in their hostile and aggressive social interactions with their parents which make them feel better and relieve their tension.

Childbearing has been recognized as the major role of every woman in our contemporary societies. Aside from establishing such ideologies of child-bearing as the primary role of women in society, the male child syndrome had been at an alarming rate in virtually every culture, especially in African societies. In Africa, the birth of a male child determines the stability of marriage (Lundberg, 2015). In Nigeria and other parts of Africa, female children may be generally viewed as having the responsibility and support to their marital homes and not their parents. In African culture, females are viewed largely in childbearing and rearing roles, while males are breadwinners and responsible for the public domain. Onuaha, (2010) observed that when a male child is born, the celebration and joy at reception are not comparable to that of the arrival of a female baby who is received with mixed feelings. This preference may affect the psychological adjustment of female children and the woman who produces them.

Such children (the low preferred) may tend to engage in antisocial vices, which may affect society adversely. Male child syndrome in Nigeria has remained a salient but one of the greatest hindrances to family acceptance. It may be seen that women who bear only female children have to keep trying till either stopped by age, death, or the arrival of a male child. Preference in most tribes is causing so many problems to families and this often leads to the birth of children who are not desired and may not be supported by the family income. Such children may be neglected since they are not preferred in the family. This preference may affect children as they may either engage in drugs, alcohol, prostitution, or stealing (Okeibunor, 2011).

According to (Beyeza, 2010), married women who do not have male children are faced with feelings of anxiety, depression, loss and helplessness, frustration, and rejection from people. Under such conditions, their husbands may threaten to bring in other women who will bear male children for them. The woman may try to resist the plan or attempt to leave the marriage or become helpless or remain in the marriage. The women are being abused both verbally and physically by their husbands for not bearing them a male child. The lives of the affected women are completely disconnected because of the violence and emotional challenges they face. The violence of course is associated with symptoms of psychological trauma and exposure to conditions where life becomes meaningless. This could be a source of psychological trauma for these concerned women.

The psychological adjustment could be the state of coping with the effect or withdrawal of parental hurtful behaviour, such as rejection, which is expressed as cold and unaffectionate, hostile and aggressive, indifferent, neglecting, and indifferent rejection. However, a child's reaction to psychological adjustment of parental sex preference may be influenced by such variables as aggression and depression. Apart from depression, parental sex preference may affect depressive feelings of female children. Depression is one of the psychological results of stress. When stress continues beyond the initial warning stage and remains constant over a while until the child passes from the stage of resistance to exhaustion, depression sets in. Barber (2011) reported that a child might be depressed when he/she may not be preferred and lacks the motivation necessary to find pleasure in his or her activities and his/her feelings could become more and more negative

In Jalingo Local Government Area Taraba State Nigeria, Male child syndrome has affected female producing women. The majority of marriages had been affected not because women are not productive, but rather because they were giving birth to female children instead of the male children who are perceived to be the actual sustainers of lineage, holders of central titles, and often, most important positions of authority and inheritors of immovable properties. The traumatic experience of women in the conditions above is a pity because their personal lives become less meaningful for the reason of both the physical and mental pains they are immersed in. Just as (Eckenrod, 2008) noted, experiencing such life-threatening situations lead to bodily responses and immune system failures. These conditions are considered physiological effect (Cook, 2001), and causes emotional and psychological problem.

It is observed that for children to have a sense of identity, they also need psychological fulfillment in the form of acceptance and love by others to have high self-esteem. When the psychological needs of children are not satisfied by parents, they may become maladjusted and become a nuisance to society. Adjustment may be defined as an adaptation that is expected to lead a child out of the effect of parental sex preference. It is measured psychologically and socially. The psychological adjustment could be the state of coping with the effect or withdrawal of parental hurtful behaviour such as rejection which is expressed as cold and unaffectionate, hostile and aggressive, indifferent, neglecting, and indifferent rejection. When children are lowly preferred, or women often give birth to the low preferred children; either or both of them may become maladjusted and the tendencies for them to cope with such aggressive and depressive behaviour becomes high as compared to those families where there is a mix of male and female children. The researcher, therefore, seeks to determine the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of female and female producing women in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State. Rohner (2004) found that not all lowly preferred children develop serious adjustment problems. He affirms that some children can cope with the pain of parental sex preference more effectively than others. Hence there is a gap that this research intends to fill. The pertinent question therefore arises. These challenges have been of worry to the researcher to investigate the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of females and female bearing women in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba state.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of Male Child Syndrome on the Psychological Adjustment of Females and Female Producing Women in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Ascertain the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria
- ii. Ascertain the influence of male child syndrome on the low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study;

- i. What is the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the influence of male child syndrome on the low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

### **Research methodology**

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The descriptive survey design is appropriate for this study because it has the important characteristics of providing accurate information, if it is carefully and effectively used, and the subjects of the study do not have any control group where the reverse factors are tested. It is a descriptive survey because it does not require experimentation with the respondents on the topic at hand. Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria is located in Northeast Nigeria. The population that was used for this study was the entire single and married females in Jalingo Local Government Area. A sample is a portion of the population selected for the study. The researcher adopted a systematic sampling technique in selecting the areas that partook in the study to reduce biases and to give consistency. Thus, the sample for the study comprised ninety (90) females and ninety (90) female producing women making 180 respondents altogether were randomly selected from educational centers, recreational centers, as well as market places in each of the three Local Government areas in Jalingo Local Government Area.

The instrument that was used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled "Male Child Syndrome on Female Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (MSFPAQ)". The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and the review of related literature for this study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections A and B. Section A contained information on the demographic data of the respondents while Section B covered five items from each of the research questions. On the whole, the instrument contained 30-items structured on a Likert point rating scale with response modes of Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2), and Strongly Disagree (SD=1). To establish whether the instruments measure what they ought to measure, the MSPAQ was checked and experts in the Guidance and Counselling Department, Taraba State University, Jalingo. The experts critically examined each of the items in the instrument and make comments and corrections on the scope of coverage, content relevance, ambiguity, and vagueness of expressions. The comments, corrections, and suggestions of the experts as to modify the instruments for the study, after which the final copies were produced for administration on the sampled respondents. Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used to determine the reliability coefficient. The reliability coefficient was obtained by administering 20

copies of the instrument to females and female producing women in those areas that form part of the population but are not included in sampled areas. 18 out of the 20 questionnaires were recovered. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 20 by applying Cronbach's Alpha reliability test method. The reliability result of .996 shows that the instrument is reliable for data collection. A direct delivery technique was employed in the administration of the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** What is the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area?

To answer this research question, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the instrument were used and the data collected from respondents were shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Mean Scores on Influence of Male Child Syndrome on the Psychological Adjustment of Female Producing Women**

S/N	Item Description	N	$\bar{X}$	Std. D	Decision
1	Quest for a male child has overtaken my husband that I barely understand him	180	2.83	1.170	Accepted
2	My husband told me to either give him a male child to save my marriage or be ready to be divorced.	180	2.67	1.057	Accepted
3	My in-laws often mock me because I have not given birth to a male child.	180	2.67	1.002	Accepted
4	Asking me to bear a male child by my in-laws gives me some spiritual misconceptions	180	2.72	.992	Accepted
5	I do not feel secure anymore in my marital home because of my male child preference.	180	2.72	.934	Accepted
6	I feel like stabbing myself because of the emotional trauma of not giving birth to a male child	180	2.50	1.017	Accepted
7	I live in daily emotional depression because I have no single male child to show	180	2.83	1.170	Accepted
8	I develop some psychological problems due to a lack of male child	180	2.72	1.149	Accepted
9	My friends deserted me because I have not given birth to a male child	180	2.44	1.015	Rejected
10	I have been compelled to go to native doctors for the spiritual incantation to have a male child	180	2.56	1.261	Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>180</b>	<b>2.66</b>		<b>Accepted</b>

**Source:** Field Survey (2021)

**Mean:**  $\bar{X} > 2.50$  (Accepted).

**Mean:**  $\bar{X} < 2.50$  (Rejected).

Table 1: Presents mean scores on the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area. The cluster mean of 2.66 shows that the majority of the respondents agree that male child syndrome negatively influences the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area.

**Research Question 2:** What is the influence of male child syndrome on the low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area?

To answer this research question, items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 of the instrument were used and the data collected from respondents were shown in Table 2.

**Table 3: Mean Scores on the Influence of Male Child Syndrome on the Low Preferred Children**

S/N	Item Description	N	$\bar{X}$	St. D	Decision
11	Male child syndrome affects the growth and development of female ones.	180	3.11	1.200	Accepted
12	A female child is often neglected in terms of family deliberations.	180	2.94	.914	Accepted
13	The female child is denied the room to discuss her problems with her father because of male child syndrome.	180	2.78	1.086	Accepted
14	The low preferred female child is undereducated due to the absence of a male child in the family.	180	2.67	.945	Accepted
15	Low preferred children often fell victims to psychological depression	180	3.00	1.003	Accepted
16	Denial of the female child makes her fall victim to emotional problems.	180	3.11	.877	Accepted
17	A female child is been denied the right to contribute when it comes to family issues	180	3.11	.877	Accepted
18	A female child is given low spiritual value as she is said to be a weaker vessel.	180	3.06	.973	Accepted
19	A female child is often forced to marry early in the family where there is a male syndrome.	180	3.22	1.086	Accepted
20	The low preferred female child faces rejection by her family as compared to the male child	180	2.89	.997	Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>180</b>	<b>2.99</b>		<b>Accepted</b>

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Criterion Mean  $\bar{X} > 2.50$  (Accepted).      Criterion Mean:  $\bar{X} < 2.50$  (Rejected).

Table 3: Presents mean scores on the influence of male child syndrome on the low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area. The cluster mean of 2.99 shows that majority of the respondents agree that male child syndrome affects the development of low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area.

### Discussion

This study investigated the influence of Male Child Syndrome on the Psychosocial Adjustment of Females and Female Producing Women in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria.”

The analysis of data revealed that male child syndrome negatively influences the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area. This result agrees with Beyeza's (2010) study found that married women who do not have male children are faced with feelings of anxiety, depression, loss and helplessness, frustration, and rejection from people. Under such conditions, their husbands may threaten to bring in other women who will bear male children for them. The woman may try to resist the plan or attempt to leave the marriage or become helpless or remain in the marriage. The lives of the affected women are completely disconnected because of the violence and emotional challenges they face. The violence of course is associated with symptoms of psychological trauma and exposure to conditions where life becomes meaningless. This could be a source of psychological trauma for these concerned women.

Findings from Research Question 2 as presented in Table 2 show that the respondents agree that male child syndrome affects the development of low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area. This result is in line with Barber (2011) who reported that a child might be depressed when he/she may not be preferred and lacks the motivation necessary to find pleasure in his or her activities and his/her feelings could become more and more negative. For a child to get adjusted to the effect of parental sex preference, he or she should adapt to depressive situations to adjust socially.

This study goes in line with that of Egede and Egede (2010) who found out that, women, girls, and families have various sad experiences due to male-child preference. Foremost among the experiences is the unnecessary and unmanageable large family size and a resort to polygamy. Women are blamed for giving birth to baby girls and consequently, suffer embarrassment and violence for it. The women feel that male preference should be eliminated and favored the method of mass literacy to fight it. The result showed this is another common (85%) experience. One respondent added birthday celebrations to item 17 in Table 1. Thus the girl-child

faces discrimination early in life. There was an MTN advert for "mama a boy" which has been criticized vehemently because of this experience. Why not "mama a girl?" Hassan (2009) observed that many celebrate the birth of a male child while that of a girl is received with little less joy. Her observation corroborates the result of this experience. The findings aligned with that of Ine (2013) who revealed that son preference with particular emphasis on Igbo custom in Nigeria and discovered its deep-rooted nature in the psyche of the people as well as the fact that it is a violation of human rights of women and suggested measures to curb same.

This finding is akin to what was discovered by Das Gupta and Chung (2007). The researchers found a significant relationship between the interpretation and understanding of religion and male child preference. Specifically, Das Gupta and Chung (2007) discovered that Buddhism is strongly associated with higher son preference in the case of women. However, being Buddhist does not have a significant relationship with male child preference in the case of their husbands.

Onuaha (2010), opines that when a male child is born, the celebration and joy at reception are not comparable to that of the arrival of a female baby who is received with mixed feelings. This preference may affect female children and the woman who produces them. Such children (the low preferred) may tend to engage in antisocial vices, which may affect society adversely. Male child syndrome in Nigeria has remained a salient but one of the greatest hindrances to family acceptance. It may be seen that women who bear only female children have to keep trying till either stopped by age, death, or the arrival of a male child. Preference in most tribes is causing so many problems to families and this often leads to the birth of children who are not desired and may not be supported by the family income. Such children may be neglected since they are not preferred in the family. This preference may affect children as they may either engage in drugs, alcohol, prostitution, or stealing (Okeibunor, 2011). The finding of this study is in line with Gunnar, Karsten, and Andres (2013), the findings showed clear indications of a preference for having at least one child of each sex. They concluded that parental sex preference is a long-standing cultural phenomenon, related to the country of childhood socialization rather than language group.

### **Conclusion**

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that: Male child syndrome negatively influences the psychological adjustment of female producing women in Jalingo Local Government Area. The effect of Male child syndrome is evident in almost every society. The females and female producing women are often maltreated, humiliated, and often neglected. These forms of maltreatment of the female genders [females and female producing women] affected with male child syndromes often lead to their psychological, and emotional as evident in Jalingo Local Government Area. Furthermore, Male child syndrome affects the development of low preferred children in Jalingo Local Government Area.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that:

- i. Community leaders and traditional heads should sound a warning or members to abolish the perception that women who are not giving birth to male children should be treated badly. This is because every child is a gift that needs to be celebrated irrespective of gender.
- ii. Government should provide job opportunities for women giving birth to female children only to give them a financial boost that will enhance them to provide for the basic needs of the female children and also train the children up educationally.
- iii. Workshops, seminars symposiums should be organized for women in worship centers, schools/colleges, and recreational centers, as well as market places on the influence of male child syndrome on the psychological adjustment of females and female producing women.

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