

## **Son Preference among Women: Evidence from a Village in Meerut**

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**Abstract:** This study, *Son Preference among Women: Evidence from a Village in Meerut*, explores the socio-economic background of Hindu married women aged 21–45 and examines the causes underlying son preference. Data were collected from 100 respondents using interview schedules and analyzed through simple statistical methods. Results reveal that most women belong to the 26–40 age group, live in nuclear families, and possess moderate literacy, though female workforce participation remains low and income levels modest. Son preference is strongly influenced by multiple factors: economically, sons are seen as contributors and providers of old-age security; socially, they enhance prestige and fulfill obligations; psychologically, they offer satisfaction and companionship; and religiously, they are viewed as essential for lineage and salvation. The findings highlight that son preference is deeply rooted in cultural, emotional, and religious beliefs, requiring integrated strategies for gender equity.

**Keywords:** *Son Preference, Socio-Economic Profile, Gender Bias, Hindu Women, Lineage, Psychological, Social, Economic, Religious Beliefs.*

**Introduction:** A woman is a female human. The term women are usually reserved for an adult, with the term girl being the usual term for a female child or adolescent. However, the term women are also sometimes used to identify a female human, regardless of age. Reproductive behavior related to the production of offspring. It includes such patterns as the establishment of mating systems, courtship, sexual behavior, parturition and the care of young. Successful reproductive efforts require the establishment of a situation favorable for reproduction, often require behavior leading to the union of male and female gametes, and often require behavior that facilitates or ensure the survival and development of the young; the mere union of gametes is not generally sufficient for successful reproduction. (<https://dictionary.apa.org/reproductive-behavior>)

Gender discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of individuals in the workplace based on their sex, often manifesting in disparities in hiring, promotion, pay, benefits, and workplace privileges. Such bias is rooted in stereotypes about gender roles and expectations, which can limit opportunities for women and reinforce systemic inequality. Research shows that discriminatory practices not only affect career progression but also contribute to broader social and economic disparities (Koch, D’Mello, & Sackett, 2015).

Sexism is a form of prejudice or discrimination directed at individuals based on their sex, often rooted in traditional stereotypes of gender roles. These attitudes can perpetuate the belief that one sex is inherently superior to the other, which in turn influences social and workplace practices. For example,

job applicants may encounter discriminatory hiring processes, and employees may face unequal pay or treatment compared to peers of the opposite sex. Such systemic bias not only restricts opportunities for women but also reinforces broader patterns of inequality in society (Ridgeway, 2011). Son preference refers to the cultural and social attitude of valuing male children over female children, often influencing family decisions about fertility, resource allocation, and child-rearing practices. This bias is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, where sons are perceived as carriers of the family lineage, providers of financial support, and caretakers of parents in old age. In contrast, daughters are frequently viewed as an economic burden due to dowry practices and the expectation that they will eventually marry into another household. Studies show that son preference contributes to gender-biased fertility strategies, such as sex-selective abortions and stopping rules in childbearing, which in turn exacerbate gender inequalities in education, health, and survival outcomes (Congdon Fors & Lindskog, 2023). Evidence from India and other South Asian countries highlights that despite modernization, son preference remains a persistent social phenomenon, reinforcing structural gender disparities (Kumar, 2021).

Das Gupta, A. (2003) focuses on the cultural value of son preference and its impact on fertility behaviour across four major religious communities in Patna: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh. The study reveals that son preference acts as a driver of higher fertility, though its influence varies across religious groups. The analysis demonstrates that cultural norms and religious identities shape reproductive behaviour in distinct ways, but the overarching theme is that the desire for sons perpetuates larger family sizes. Singh, A., Ram, F., & Ranjan, R. (2006) investigates how couples in Uttar Pradesh, India, articulate their reproductive goals and how these goals intersect with policy concerns. The authors highlight notable gender differences in fertility preferences. Wives were more likely than husbands to express a desire to stop having children, yet paradoxically, they also showed stronger preferences for their next child to be male. The findings emphasize the significant influence husbands exert over reproductive decisions, suggesting that policies aimed at family planning must account for men's perspectives as well as women's.

Koolwal (2007) made a study on son preference and child labor in Nepal, examining the household impact of sending girls to work. The author found that son preference influenced household labor allocation, with girls disproportionately burdened by child labor, which negatively affected their education and long-term opportunities. Asadullah, Mansoor, Randazzo, & Wahhaj (2021) highlights in their study on whether son preference is disappearing from Bangladesh. The authors found evidence of a gradual decline in son preference, though cultural norms and economic factors continued to sustain gender bias in certain regions. Le & Nguyen (2021) point out the son preference and health disparities in developing countries. The authors found that son preference contributed to unequal health outcomes, with girls experiencing disadvantages in nutrition, healthcare access, and survival compared to boys.

**Objectives of the study-** The study is focused on the following objectives-

1. To assess the socio-economic profiles of the respondents.
2. To identify the causes of son preference of the respondents.

**Area of the study-** The study has been conducted in Sarurpur Khurd village of Meerut District. The village is situated at Meerut to Baraut Road. This village is multi-caste village; there are two communities namely-Hindu and Muslim.

**Methodology-** The data has been collected from 100 Hindu women for the required fulfillment of the objectives of the study. Data has been collected by using the interview schedule methods. The information has been collected from the Hindu married women belong to the age group of 21-45. Data have been analyzed by using the simple statistical method.

**Results and Discussion-**

**1. Socio-economic profile of the respondents:**

The various socio-economic profile variables have been observed during the field observation.

**Table 1: The socio-economic profile distribution of the respondents**

S.No.	Variable	Attribute	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Age	21-25	5	5%
		26-30	26	26%
		31-35	23	23%
		36-40	24	24%
		41-45	22	22%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	Caste	Upper	24	24%
		Middle	50	50%
		Lower	26	26%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
3	Education	Illiterate	10	10%
		Primary level (1-5)	27	27%
		Secondary level (6-9)	24	24%
		High Secondary and Intermediate	14	14%
		Graduation and above	25	25%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
4	Occupation	House wife	86	86%
		Working women	14	14%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
5	Type of Family	Nuclear	75	75%
		Joint	25	25%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
6	Size of Family	Small (1-4 members)	39	39%
		Middle (5-8 members)	50	50%
		Large (9 and above members)	11	11%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
7	Income	5000-10,000	47	47%
		10,001-15,000	19	19%
		15,001-20,000	16	16%
		20,001-25,000	8	8%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
8	Condition of Residence	Pakka House	92	92%
		Kachecha House	8	8%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
9	No. of Rooms	Single Room	1	1%
		2-3 Rooms	51	51%
		4-5 Rooms	48	48%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
		Yes	85	85%

<b>10</b>	<b>Sanitation Facility</b>	No	15	15%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Age:** Majority of respondents fall in the 26–40 age group (73%), with the largest share being 26–30 years (26%). Only 5% are in the youngest category (21–25 years).

The majority being in the 26–40 age group suggests a population in its prime working years. However, the dominance of housewives (86%) highlights low female workforce participation, which may be influenced by cultural norms, limited opportunities, or educational barriers.

**Caste:** Middle caste group dominates (50%), followed by lower caste (26%) and upper caste (24%).

The predominance of the middle caste group (50%) reflects a socially diverse sample. The presence of 26% lower caste respondents indicates inclusivity, but also points to possible socio-economic disadvantages that may affect income and education.

**Education:** Literacy is moderate: 90% have some level of education. Highest proportion is at primary level (27%), while 25% have completed graduation or above. 10% remain illiterate.

While literacy is relatively high (90%), the concentration at primary and secondary levels shows limited advancement to higher education. The 25% with graduation and above represent a significant educated minority, potentially driving social change.

**Occupation:** Housewives form the overwhelming majority (86%), with only 14% engaged in paid work.

**Family Structure and Size:** Nuclear families dominate (75%), while joint families account for 25%. Medium-sized families (5–8 members) are most common (50%). Small families (39%) are more prevalent than large families (11%).

The dominance of nuclear families (75%) suggests a shift away from traditional joint family systems, possibly due to urbanization, economic pressures, or changing social values. Medium-sized families (50%) indicate balanced household structures.

**Income:** Nearly half (47%) earn ₹5,000–10,000 per month, indicating a low-income profile. Only 8% fall in the higher bracket (₹20,001–25,000).

The income distribution reveals economic vulnerability, with nearly half earning below ₹10,000 per month. This low-income profile may restrict access to healthcare, education, and better living standards.

**Housing and Sanitation:** Pakka houses dominate (92%), showing relatively stable housing. Only 8% live in kachcha houses. Most households have 2–3 rooms (51%) or 4–5 rooms (48%). Single-room households are rare (1%). 85% have toilet facilities, while 15% lack access, indicating some infrastructural gaps.

The prevalence of pakka houses (92%) and multi-room dwellings indicates relatively stable housing conditions. However, the 15% lacking toilet facilities highlights persistent sanitation challenges, which are critical for public health.

## 2. Causes of son preference among respondents-

The various causes of son preference have been observed during the field observation:

**Table 2: The causes of son preference distribution of the respondents**

S.No.	Variable	Attribute	No. of Respondents			Total
			Yes	No	Undecided	
1	<b>Economic Cause of Son Preference</b>	Son provides helping hand	91	01	08	100
		Source of receiving dowry	0	52	48	100
		Economic security in old age	66	00	34	100
2	<b>Social Cause of Son Preference</b>	Social security in old age	66	00	34	100
		Enhancing prestige in the community	52	01	47	100
		Manpower and physical strength in village feuds	63	03	34	100
		Helps in meeting family obligation	70	02	28	100
3	<b>Psychological Cause of Son Preference</b>	Good friend during one's old age	72	00	28	100
		A psychological satisfaction in itself	99	00	01	100
4	<b>Religious Cause of Son Preference</b>	Medium of achieving salutation	97	0	3	100
		Maintain lineage	99	00	01	100

**Economic Causes**

**Helping hand in economic activities:** 91% of respondents believe sons provide economic support; only 1% disagreed, while 8% were undecided.

**Source of dowry:** None of the respondents affirmed this; 52% rejected the idea, while 48% remained undecided.

**Economic security in old age:** 66% agreed sons provide security, while 34% were undecided.

The overwhelming majority (91%) view sons as contributors to economic activities, reflecting the traditional reliance on male labor in agriculture and other livelihood tasks. Similarly, two-thirds (66%) believe sons provide economic security in old age, underscoring the absence of institutional support systems like pensions or social security. Interestingly, none of the respondents endorsed the idea of sons as a source of dowry, suggesting changing attitudes toward dowry practices or reluctance to openly acknowledge them.

**Social Causes**

**Social security in old age:** 66% affirmed, 34% undecided.

**Enhancing prestige in community:** 52% agreed, 47% undecided, 1% disagreed.

**Manpower in village feuds:** 63% agreed, 34% undecided, 3% disagreed.

**Meeting family obligations:** 70% agreed, 28% undecided, 2% disagreed.

Sons are perceived as essential for social prestige and security, with 52% affirming their role in enhancing community status and 70% recognizing their importance in fulfilling family obligations. The belief that sons provide manpower in village disputes (63%) highlights the persistence of patriarchal norms where male strength is valued in conflict resolution. These findings suggest that sons are seen as protectors and status-bearers, reinforcing their social desirability.

## Psychological Causes

**Good friend in old age:** 72% agreed, 28% undecided.

**Psychological satisfaction:** 99% agreed, 1% undecided.

The psychological attachment to sons is striking: 99% of respondents believe having a son brings satisfaction, and 72% see sons as companions in old age. This reflects deep-rooted cultural conditioning where sons symbolize emotional security and continuity, while daughters are often perceived as transient due to marriage and relocation.

## Religious Causes

**Medium of achieving salvation:** 97% agreed, 3% undecided.

**Maintaining lineage:** 99% agreed, 1% undecided.

Religious beliefs strongly reinforce son preference: 97% view sons as a medium for salvation, and 99% believe sons maintain lineage. These findings highlight the spiritual and ritualistic significance of sons, particularly in performing last rites and continuing family traditions. Such beliefs perpetuate son preference across generations, making it resistant to change.

**Conclusion:** The study on *Son Preference among Women: Evidence from a Village in Meerut* demonstrates the persistence of traditional attitudes toward male children, deeply rooted in socio-economic, psychological, social, and religious dimensions of rural life. The socio-economic profile of respondents reflects a community in transition: literacy levels are moderate and housing conditions relatively stable, yet low income, limited female workforce participation, and infrastructural gaps continue to shape everyday realities. The dominance of nuclear families suggests a gradual shift from joint family systems, but patriarchal norms remain influential in household roles and expectations.

The causes of son preference reveal that women overwhelmingly associate sons with economic support (91%), social prestige (52–70%), psychological satisfaction (99%), and religious obligations (97–99%). Sons are perceived not only as contributors to household labor and protectors in social disputes but also as essential for emotional security, lineage continuity, and salvation. These findings highlight that son preference is not merely an economic calculation but a multidimensional cultural phenomenon reinforced by psychological comfort and religious beliefs.

The rejection of dowry as a cause indicates shifting norms in certain areas, yet the dominance of religious and psychological factors underscores the resilience of traditional ideologies. Overall, son preference in Meerut is sustained by a complex interplay of economic vulnerability, patriarchal structures, emotional conditioning, and religious rituals. Addressing this issue requires integrated strategies—economic empowerment, educational advancement, and cultural awareness—to challenge entrenched narratives and promote gender equity in rural communities.

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