

ATTITUDE OF SON PREFERENCE PREDICTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PAKISTANI TV DRAMAS

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Son preference has been evident from the start of hunting and gathering societies. Pakistan is a patriarchal society whereas families still prefer to have son as compared to daughter in order to secure their future economic status. Moreover, media is also becoming a major agent of transmitting social norms and behaviors among masses. Taking into account the importance of media, the present study analyzed the portrayal of son preference in Pakistan TV dramas and its effect on women status. The present study employed a qualitative content analysis approach. The sample of four dramas (Mubarik ho beti Hui ha, Beti, Mujhe Beta Chahiye and Guru) presenting the theme of son preference was selected through purposive sampling. The major finding of this research was that violence against women due to son preference is highlighting through media content especially dramas. In Pakistani TV dramas women are portrayed as victim of emotional, physical, psychological and domestic violence due to son preference and male is portrayed as dominant and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. This study highlights the deep ingrained factors that maintain gender inequality and violence against women emphasizing the necessity of a change in media industry and promotes women's right.

Keywords: *Portrayal, Son preference, Violence, Violence against women, Pakistani TV dramas*

INTRODUCTION

In many societies son preference remains one of the most persistent gender equality issues with males receiving preferential treatment over females. Despite rapid advancements in education and communication the desire for a son continues to grow. In Pakistan gender based discrimination is rooted in cultural and economic elements and women are increasingly subjected to violence as a result of son preference (Saeed, 2015).

Pakistan like many other Asian countries is a patriarchal society. As a result, the desire for a son is a deeply rooted cultural norm supported by widespread feudal kinship systems in various regions of the country. In rural areas, son preference is particularly strong because sons are considered better suited for agricultural work. It is commonly believed that a son will take care of the family estate and continue the feudal legacy. In such areas, sons are expected to carry on the family name and lineage and often take on the role of caregivers for their parents in old age (Guilmoto, 2012).

On the other hand, Media plays a big role in shaping how people think and behave in society. These days many people watch TV for more than four hours every day. They are more involved in media now than they were in the past. Media shows certain images of men and women that influence how people see them. Men and boys are often shown as strong, hardworking, and active doing things like fighting, building, or working. In contrast women and girls are usually shown in quiet roles, doing housework, being emotional, or caring about their looks. These gender

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stereotypes appear not only in TV dramas and shows but also in ads and commercials (Adil, 2021).

TV dramas in Pakistan often show a true picture of our culture and society. They highlight traditions, beliefs, customs, and the daily lives of people from different backgrounds, castes, and social classes. These dramas also show how people are affected by problems in the community, like marriage issues, divorce, childbirth, and the preference for sons. Sometimes these shows copy Indian culture and people in Pakistan start to follow that which can weaken our own culture. Many also start to live more like Western people changing their values and lifestyle. This change affects young people the most. When they watch such content they start to believe in more freedom and adopt new ideas that may not match our culture (Tabassum, 2020).

Over the past few decades media technology has developed rapidly leading to a significant increase in its influence on cultural, religious, and social aspects of society. In general social media and other tools are easy to access and widely used. Because of this widespread use and fast growth media has had a deep impact on both cultural and national levels especially in countries where culture, literature, and language are seen as central sources of power (Spirchagova, 2021).

Today Pakistani TV dramas affect people in many ways. They can change how viewers think about crime, violence, and social behavior. Dramas may also support gender discrimination. Since people learn by watching others, too much violence in dramas can lead to more violent actions in real life. People who regularly watch violent scenes may start copying them. What we see in dramas can shape how we act and what we believe (Faiz, 2020).

Similarly, Violence against women is often connected to society's belief that men should have power and control as the heads of families. This risk becomes worse when gender inequality is combined with poverty or racism (de Ávila, 2018). According to the World Health Organization about 60% of women worldwide have faced some kind of violence. Most of this violence comes from their husbands or in-laws (Bhandari, 2017).

However, the media frequently sensationalizes stories of violence in order to attract a wider audience. Media shows that type of content which gain males attention. The visual picture and desire are the key ingredients of viewer responses. In Pakistani TV dramas, physical and verbal abuse of married women is often portrayed as a common and accepted behavior. These representations have the potential maintain gender-based violence by normalizing it and presenting it as a regular aspect of married life. By the process of observational learning, audience may digest these images and begin to accept violence against women as a normal part of their own lives (Javed, 2023).

Significance of the study

Exploring the portrayal of son preference is presented in Pakistani TV dramas were crucial to understand and address with deeply rooted gender biases and the violence against women within the Pakistani society. This study holds significant importance for both culture and society as it showed how media normalized multiple kinds of violence against women which includes domestic, psychological, physical and emotional abuse and it additionally supports discriminatory practices in society. The research aims to increase awareness and create discussion on gender equality. This awareness is necessary for dramas makers, content creators and for the general

public as it challenges the misconceptions also promotes the gender equality among individuals and stop violence against women. Overall findings of this study will contribute to existing literature. It also contributed to the extend conversation on the gender equality and abuse prevention that will helped in shaping media content cultural and societal norms in a more diverse and fair directions.

Objectives of the study

- To explore the portrayal of son preference in Pakistani TV dramas.
- To understand the role of media in shaping societal attitudes towards son preference and violence against women.
- To analyze the impact of son preference on women's social status in Pakistani TV dramas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The son preference is found in various areas around the world. It consists of a variety of cultural and social norms strongly rooted in clear preference for a male child in the family with sometimes rejecting behavior for the girl child. In many areas of Pakistan the birth of a son is welcomed in very auspicious manners. However, this unbiased son preference has led to the death of many innocent baby girls. And the death rate has increased significantly. According to the observed data, it can be seen generally in some South Asian countries including Pakistan, India, China and South Korea. Because of the importance of the male child, every year according to updated data, one million children die due to poor care and poor nutrition (Kapoor, 2000).

Research has shown that the desire for a son has a remarkable impact on reproductive choices. According to Baker (2016) even with twin babies there can be imbalance treatment between son and daughters and in the region of

United States, United Kingdom, and Canada parents are more likely to spend more time with their male child. In Pakistan, the core beliefs order the visibility of the sons over daughters in different subcultures. If a baby girl is born then it is not considered as profitable for the family and boys are thought to be more honored since their birth (Butt, 2017).

While on the other hand Datto (2010) has reviewed, these everyday opera texts portray such pictures where a woman and man have multiple relationships with each other. Both in locally and globally produced TV dramas and commercials reveals males as extremely contributing members of the family and female have been seen as submissive, weak and emotional. Ijaz (2018) examined how people have adopted specific customs and gained certain ways to spend their life. Through virtual communication, media promote critical thinking. A notable factor in television watching is the social system. In Pakistan, a huge amount of electronic media channels are very young and lack a clear understanding of what constitutes good and bad for community. Multiple TV dramas and shows have altered their drama and show production patterns to the formats and methods of Indian and Western TV systems. There are many contents which are not matching with the social norms and culture of our society, in which we live.

Naz (2015) claims that male and female are learning many things from daily soap operas, which includes how to make decisions in life, pick a profession, and speak out against unfair behavior. Prime time is the most significant period, when families watch TV dramas by setting together and they can easily represent sexism and inequality. According to Tarar (2017) Pakistan is included among the countries where violence against women is

primarily committed by men. In Pakistan, and young girls and women faced 70 percent sexual and physical violence from their partners, while on the other hand 90 percent of women faced some form of sexual violence in public places.

According to Hadi (2019), Pakistan is a patriarchal society where son preference is considered a deeply rooted social norm. Patriarchal values are strongly embedded in Pakistani culture, determining the subordinate status of women. Male authority is imposed not only through restrictive codes of conduct but also through gender segregation and ideologies that associate family honor with a woman's virtue. Pakistan ranks as the third most dangerous country in the world for women. Gender-based violence remains a major human rights violation and is both a symptom and a tool of the patriarchal system.

Existing literature highlights several issues related to gender discrimination, including sex-selective abortions fueled by the strong desire for sons. Girls face limited access to education, fewer opportunities for higher studies, and reduced chances of assuming leadership roles. Additionally, daughters are often viewed as a financial burden due to dowry expectations contributing to lower demand for female children. Son preference also contributes to higher child mortality rates and neglect of girls' healthcare. The cultural acceptance of second marriages to produce a male heir further reinforces this issue.

A major gap in the literature is the insufficient focus on violence against women resulting from extreme son preference. This study addresses that gap by analyzing Pakistani TV dramas to explore how patriarchal mindsets promote violence against women, reinforce gender bias, and perpetuate son preference.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of patriarchy is the theoretical framework for understanding the attitude of son preference predicting violence against women in Pakistani TV dramas. Patriarchal theory argues that the system in which men as a group is constructed as superior to women as a group and as such has authority over them. Furthermore Patriarchal theory also claims that societies are organized in ways that benefit and prioritize and male which results in oppressions and exploitation of women. It investigates the ways in which traditional gender norms and roles are reinforced by the distribution of authority, power, and privilege along the boundaries of gender.

Social Learning Theory serves as the theoretical framework for understanding how son preference can lead to violence against women in Pakistani TV dramas. According to this theory, individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating others. When exposed to violence through TV dramas, films, or video games, individuals may internalize and replicate such behaviors, believing they are acceptable or even beneficial. If people repeatedly witness violent behavior being rewarded or normalized in media, they may be more likely to adopt similar behaviors in real life.

According to the lenses of above mentioned theories power structure is related to son preferences. Theory of Patriarchy related to power dynamics, gender roles and cultural norms which benefits males. Social learning theory related to observational and reinforces by rewards social concerns in which individuals learn behavior which benefit them. Together these theories shows that how societal norms and learned behaviors ongoing gender based violence. Following the above two

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lenses of the theories the present study designed to analyses son preference in Pakistan television dramas.

Research Questions

1. How Pakistani media Portray son preferences in dramas?
2. What are the underlying cultural or gender norms that contribute to the portrayal of son preference and violence against women in TV dramas
3. How do gender norms of son preferences influence violence against women in Pakistan TV dramas?

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine son preference in Pakistani TV dramas.

Population

Dramas from Pakistan Television selected with the objective to analyze son preference portrayal for qualitative study. The population for this study includes the dramas that aired on Pakistani television that features themes of son preferences and gender roles.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study selected through purposive sampling technique that comprised four dramas (Mubarik ho beti Hui ha, Beti, Mujhe Beta Chahiye and Guru) selected from famous channels of Pakistan television through internet aired in the last six years.

Data Analysis

Dialogues Analysis: Language highlighting son preference

Pictorials Analysis: Imagery supporting themes

Characters Analysis: Gender dynamics analysis

Comparisons: Similarities and differences across dramas

Codes and themes were developed to interpret the cultural and societal impact

ANALYSIS

Themes Identified

Emotional, physical, domestic and psychological violence.

Gender bias and discrimination.

Patriarchal norms reinforcing son preference.

Examples from Dialogues:

- “Today, I’ve become 20 years older than my age because I again became the father of a daughter. My wife is a daughter-producing machine.”
- “Now I won’t give you a single penny. You think that you would keep producing daughters and I would keep bearing their expenses.”
- “If I had known earlier that she would give birth to a daughter this time too, I would have gotten an abortion.”
- “Listen to me very clearly if you give birth to a daughter again it will not be good for you. I will bury you and that curried child also in the ground.”
- “I wanted son not a daughter she is not my daughter do one thing pick her up and throw her away from the house she is the thorn in the path of my happiness.”
- “My eyes are longing to see the face of Sadiq's son, I am afraid that I will die without seeing the face of my grandson.”

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Pictorial Analysis from Dramas



DISCUSSION

This study focused on examining the attitudes related to son preference and how they predict violence against women in Pakistani TV dramas. The research adopted a qualitative content analysis method, which effectively identified and explored key themes of son preference and its connection to various forms of violence against women as portrayed in the dramas. By analyzing storylines, character representation, and culturally embedded themes, this approach enabled the study to shed light on how Pakistani media both reflects and reinforces societal beliefs regarding gender roles and expectations.

By analyzing famous Pakistani TV dramas such as “Mubarik Ho Beti Hui ha, Beti, Mujhe Beta Chahiye and Guru” it becomes evident that desire for son is not only a background issue but a key element that fuels multiple forms of violence against women. This gender bias is deeply rooted in patriarchal mindsets that not only devalue the status of women and daughters but also place immense pressure on women to produce male offspring. This study draws attention to various forms of violent behavior that results from son preference which includes physical, emotional, domestic and psychological violence. Female characters of these operas are repeatedly portrayed as suffering from psychological distress and physical abuse from their husband and in-laws for not bearing a male child. This way of behavior represents societal attitudes where women dignity is typically measured by their ability to produce male offspring it reinforce cycle of discrimination and violence against women.

This study also highlights how Pakistani TV dramas contribute to the normalization and reinforcement of patriarchal mindsets and beliefs. By portraying the struggles of women in a society that prioritizes male

children, these dramas reflect the lived experiences of many Pakistani women. However, if not handled carefully, such portrayals may reinforce harmful stereotypes rather than challenge them. Furthermore, depicting women primarily as victims of violence resulting from son preference can legitimize these societal norms, making them harder to question or change.

The study concludes that media portrayals of women must become more balanced and nuanced. While some storylines attempt to challenge traditional gender roles the dominant narratives often continue to uphold patriarchal values. Media creators have a powerful opportunity to reshape public perception by featuring strong, independent female characters that resist societal pressure and reject son preference.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the urgent need to address son preference as a root cause of violence against women, both in media portrayals and in social discourse. The findings suggest that Pakistani TV dramas significantly shape public understanding of gender roles and family structures, as they mirror dominant cultural ideologies. By questioning these portrayals and advocating for more equitable representations, Pakistani media can play a crucial role in reducing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality. This study underscores the importance of continued research and dialogue on the complex relationship between culture, media, and gender-based violence, with the ultimate goal of fostering a more inclusive and just society.

LIMITATIONS

Limited dramatic scope of Analysis: A few Pakistani TV dramas such as “Mubarik ho beti Hui ha, Beti, Mujhe beta Chahiye and Guru” were the subject of this study. Even while these TV dramas offer significant insights the findings could not fully represent the whole range of Pakistani television production. To understand the deeper comprehensive analysis further research might include an increased number of dramas across different channels and time periods.

Subjectivity in Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative content analysis applied in this study. The researcher perspective influenced by their interpretation of characters, themes and storyline are interpreted which can lead to bias. Although efforts I made to maintain objectivity multiple researchers may understand the same content alternatively.

Focus on mainstream media: The study primarily analyzed mainstream TV dramas which may differ in content and message from digital media. Further studies should examine how these platforms address violence against women and son preference in the context of growing popularity of video streaming and media content makers. It might also provide different viewpoints or more advance storyline.

RECCOMENDATIONS

Following were the recommendations from the results of the present study:

- Media and PEMRA should hire gender specialist.
- Encourage the creation of gender sensitive content.
- Involve men and boys in discussion on gender equality.
- For writers and Producers develop training programs.
- Promote diverse portrayal of women

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