

Girl Child Neglect – Is There a Solution?

Ammarah Jamal

Girl child neglect is a concerning and complex issue with societal implications. A girl child frequently encounters the most severe forms of violence all over the world. The Culture and traditions may jeopardize their very survival. In Pakistan too, 99% of the infants abandoned in the garbage are females according to a data from 2013, shared by Edhi Foundation¹. This discrimination and prejudices against the girls often begin even before they are born^{2,3} and follow through infancy, childhood, adolescence into adulthood onward. The birth of a baby girl is not usually celebrated with joy and elation as is done for boys⁴, they are married off before the legal age of 18 years in 31% of cases⁵, verbal abuse of girls by relatives and society is highly prevalent and intense in developing countries, like Pakistan⁴.

Discrimination of girls against boys is further seen in the areas of; nutrition, health care, education, family care, protection from environmental hazards and Unmet basic needs such as clothing and food. She is left out of decision making, even for her own self & utilized at homes as house keeper^{2,4}. Parents give more importance to their brothers, irrespective of their social or economic background which make the girls feel inferior in the family⁴. This obviously cause emotional abuse which is apparent as a routine rather than exception in our society⁴. This can

leave a profound, long-lasting impact on a child's life in all domains⁶. Several risk factors have been identified by various authors as promoters of child neglect. Foremost is the concept of the families that daughters mean an economic burden and huge responsibility while investing in a son means economical support for the family in future⁴. Other factors include poverty/ unemployment, lack of education, parental relationship problems or violence, lack of support from the extended family, social isolation, inadequate housing, mental or physical ill health including substance abuse⁶. All these factors may pose a risk to child abuse but does not explain the gender bias against girls which is witnessed from among well-to-do and educated females to young girls working as maids for full day only to feed and educate their brothers and not even get a fair share of food.

It probably reflects the traditional practice of gender discrimination which still exists in the majority of boys who are valued over girls culturally, given freedom, autonomy, and care⁶ and allowed to degrade, exploit and mock the females of their family even in affluent and urbane families⁴. These cultural beliefs and customs have been kept alive since ages. The irony is that women themselves are helping maintain such environment in the name of religion and culture³. This cause of girl child neglect is less likely to respond to the suggested methods such as promoting education, dissipating myths, emphasizing justice, kindness and equity, provision of health care and empowering women. Many people are of the opinion that empowering women will create a positive impact on the society by augmenting productivity leading to economic growth, improvement in literacy rate, health improv-

Department of Pediatric, Dow University of Health Sciences

Email: drasjpk@yahoo.com

Date of Submission: 25th November 2023

Date of Acceptance: 30th November 2023

ements including psychosocial and mental well-being. Their inclusion in decision making may provide varied insights and help in community development.

These positive effects are challenged by its potential negative impact on family life such as time constraints due to increased work responsibilities for both parents thus affecting quality family time and parenting. Striking a balance between job and family responsibilities can potentially lead to stress and burnout. Inadequate time spent with children may impact their development and require additional support systems for childcare thus requiring more money, more job and thus a vicious cycle. Hectic schedules may result in communication breakdowns within the family, affecting relationships. To maintain a balance between work and life and nurturing family bonds requires selfless communal strategies, workplace practices, and cultural shifts that support both professional growth and family well-being, thus, ensuring that empowerment doesn't come at the cost of crucial family connections.

Seeking religious guidance on matters of work, family, and gender roles may help. Islam indeed is the first religion to recognize and recommend all sorts of protection & rights to women including the right to work and educate but with certain set boundaries. The emphasis on moderation and balance is inherent in Islamic teachings. Striking a balance between empowerment and the values outlined in religious texts requires careful contemplation. Those teachings may help change the deep-rooted cultural norms and historical practices which lead to female child neglect.

Today's girls, are tomorrow's wives and mothers. They play a pivotal role in defining the destiny of our generations. When a woman is trained, the whole family is positively impacted. Their mental empowerment by education positively enhances parenting, helping them impart the right kind of virtues and skills on the family, especially their sons who must be trained and educated on the topics related to gender identity, respect and rights of women and about the healthy developmental needs of both genders³.

What we want in tomorrow's children should therefore, be embedded in the girls of today, since they are the educators of future generations.

References

1. Ansari I. Saving lives: Babies lost and found. The Express Tribune [Internet]. Available from: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/633059/saving-lives-babies-lost-and-found>. Accessed on 27th November 2023.
2. Neglect of Girls During Childhood [Internet]. Edubirdie. 2022 Jun 29. Available from: <https://edubirdie.com/examples/neglect-of-girls-during-childhood/>. Accessed on 27th November 2023.
3. Aeysha M. Female Child Abuse in Pakistan [Internet]. Amazon. Kindle E book; 2017. Available from: <https://www.amazon.com/Female-Child-Abuse-Pakistan-Aeysha-ebook/dp/B076CPS57C>. Accessed on 27th November 2023.
4. Asian Human Rights Commission. PAKISTAN: Emotional abuse of girl child is not an exception [Internet]. Pakistan; 2012 May. Available from: <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-ART-039-2012/#:~:text=It%20is%20hard%20to%20detect,in%20feudal%20and%20patriarchal%20societies>. Accessed on 27th November 2023.
5. UNICEF. Child Protection [Internet]. Pakistan; [cited 2023 Nov 25].
6. Hugh James. The 10 causes of child neglect [Internet]. 2018 Oct 26. Available from: <https://www.hughjames.com/blog/the-ten-causes-of-child-neglect/>. Accessed on 27th November 2023.



This open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial 4.0 License (CC BY-NC 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>