

Gender Discrimination Among Children in Urban Slums

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ABSTRACT Gender bias continues to manifest itself in Indian society in spite of the right to equality enshrined in the constitution and the various laws. The girl child does not always enjoy the rights of childhood for reasons extraneous to her. It is the gender and culture that determines the position of girl child in the Indian social structure. This study analyzes the gender bias prevalent in the slum areas of Allahabad city of Uttar Pradesh. The sample consisted of 120 children aged five to ten years (60 of higher caste, 60 lower caste; with 30 boys and 30 girls in each category). The data was collected through interview schedules administered on the mothers. To study the gender gap a Gender Disparity Index (GDI) was calculated. Results indicate the existence of strong gender bias in both the higher caste and the lower caste slum dwellers regarding the fulfillment of the demands of the children, the type of work assigned to them, the mode of punishment, etc. The GDI values revealed slightly better position of girls in lower caste in comparison to the higher caste girls.

INTRODUCTION

In Indian civilization the child is believed to be a gift of the God to be nurtured with love, care and affection not only within the family but also within the society as a whole. Unfortunately, due to socio-economic factors, the incidence of neglect, abuse and deprivation, particularly in the case of girl child, has gradually increased. In fact it is the gender that determines the position of a child in the Indian society. As a result, the girl child does not always enjoy the rights of childhood for reasons extraneous to her. It has been found that in India, both in the upper and lower castes, the girl children are discriminated against, ranked unequally and lower and prevented from realizing their full potential (Indra et al., 1999). The girl child faces the neglect of the family in the form of a failure to provide her the basic necessities of life in terms of food, clothing, love, shelter, supervision, education and medical care (Jeya, 1990). This neglect may be either deliberate or unintentional but whatever is the cause, it restricts the support necessary for the physical, intellectual and emotional development of the girl child (Indra et al., 1999). Moreover, family structure and values function in such a way that daughter grows up looking herself as inferior and subservient (Burra et al. 1989). Several studies have revealed the existence of strong gender bias towards male in the provision of

medical care (Dasgupta, 1987; Kulkarni et al. 1999; Sundar et al. 2002), education (Chatterji, 1990; Balakrishnan, 1994; Chakraborty, 2001), food and nutrition (Gaur et al., 1994; Ghosh et al. 2001; Gopalan et al., 2001) and food distribution (Basu et al. 1986; Levinson et al., 2003). All these studies clearly show that in the Indian society there is a generalized tendency to give preferential treatment to boys over girls. The prevalence of this gender discrimination has invited the governmental intervention in this area. The Government of India, in collaboration with United Nations Development Fund for Women, New Delhi launched a countrywide gender sensitization programme in 1991. Moreover, India's National Plan of Action for Children, 1992, includes the objective of removing gender bias and improving the status of the girl child in society so as to provide her with equal opportunities for her survival and development and to help her achieve full potential. To ensure gender justice through gender equality the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) set its major objective to eliminate gender discrimination on priority basis. In line with this, the Tenth Five Year Plan of India calls for a survey/search to identify areas with gender inequalities (GOI, 2002) so as to plan effective intervention in this regard.

With this background the present study aims to analyze

1. Whether any gender differences exist in the treatment meted out to the girl child in the slum areas.

2. Whether the gender differences vary in relation to the caste hierarchy.

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METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken in the slum areas of Rajrooppur, Mundera and Mumfordganj, situated in the city of Allahabad of Uttar Pradesh, India. The inhabitants of the slum area of Mundera and Mumfordganj are mainly Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaish, which constitute the higher caste group in the caste hierarchy of the Indian social system. They have been classified as the 'higher caste group' in the present study. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the slum area of Rajrooppur mainly belong to the *Paasi* and the *Chamaar* community, which constitute the lower caste in the caste hierarchy and officially included in the scheduled castes. In the present study, these groups have been classified as the 'lower caste group'. The average monthly earnings of these slum dwellers ranges between Rs.1000.00 and Rs.1500.00 in these localities. A total of 120 children were selected taking 60 from each caste groups (higher and lower). For the said purpose, households having children aged 5-10 years were identified and listed with the help of the key informants and every 3rd household was selected from the list. Socio-demographic data and the data related to schooling pattern, fulfillment of demand, permitted games and duration of playing, mode of punishment and medical aid provided to the children were collected by using structured interview schedules, administered on the mothers of the children under study.

To find out the gender gap, a Gender Disparity Index (GDI) was calculated using the following formula (World development Indicators, 2004):

GDI = Percentage Value of indicator for male children/ Percentage Value of indicator for female children

If the value of the Index is near 1.0 it shows that the male and female children are treated similarly. If it is greater than unity, that indicates better situation for males, while a value below unity shows that the girls are better off.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It has been found that there has been a marked difference in the frequency of children attending school, at the time of interview, in the higher caste and lower caste groups. Chakraborty (2001) shows that in India the female enrolment in the school are still less than the half of the total enrolment of boys at every stage of education

and it decreases with the every next higher stage of education Table 1 shows that nearly 57% girls belonging to the higher caste are attending schools in comparison to more than 83% boys

Table 1: Schooling pattern

Group	Higher caste			Lower caste		
	AS**	NAS***	Total	AS**	NAS***	Total
Boys	25 (83.3)	05 (16.7)	30 (100.0)	20 (66.7)	10 (33.3)	30 (100.0)
Girls	17 (56.7)	13 (43.3)	30 (100.0)	18 (60.0)	12 (40.0)	30 (100.0)
Total	42 (70.0)	18 (30.0)	60 (100.0)	38 (63.3)	22 (36.7)	60 (100.0)
χ^2	4.99* (p<0.05, df=1)			0.28 (p>0.05, df=1)		
GDI	1.47			1.11		

* Significant, **Attending School, ***Not Attending School
Figures in parenthesis give the percentage values,

and the difference is statistically significant (p<0.05, df=1). The GDI value in higher caste group corroborates with the above finding. In lower caste group also boys (66.7%) have been found attending schools more frequently than the girls (60.0%), but the difference is statistically not significant (p>0.05, df=1). The GDI value also shows negligible discrimination in this group. The girls are the last to be enrolled and are first to be withdrawn, if any crisis occurs in the family (Balakrishnan, 1994).

Table 2 illustrates different criteria of selection of school for children adopted by the parents. The table shows that about 80.0% of the boys of

Table 2: School selection criteria

Group	Higher caste			Lower caste		
	Good school	Near the house	Total	Good school	Near the house	Total
Boys	24 (80.0)	06 (20.0)	30 (100.0)	20 (66.7)	10 (33.3)	30 (100.0)
Girls	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)	30 (100.0)	17 (56.7)	13 (43.3)	30 (100.0)
Total	34 (56.7)	26 (43.3)	60 (100.0)	37 (61.7)	23 (38.3)	60 (100.0)
χ^2	13.0* (p<0.01, df=1)			0.62 (p>0.01, df=1)		
GDI	2.40			1.18		

* Significant

Figures in parenthesis give the percentage value

higher caste group and 66.7% of the boys of lower caste group attend 'good school' compared to 33.7% and 56.7% of the girls of higher and lower caste groups respectively. However, the difference is statistically significant only in case of higher caste group (p<0. 1, df=1). The GDI value

(2.40) for the higher caste reveals a stronger gender bias compared to the GDI value of the lower caste group (1.18).

Table 3 shows the pattern of fulfillment of demands of children for four different demands namely purchase of playing items, extra playing time, providing the food of choice and dress of choice. In the analysis term 'always' is used when the demand is fulfilled 75-100% of times, 'often' for 50-75%, 'sometimes' for 50-25% and 'never'

for less than 25% times.

The table shows that in case of the purchase of playing items the demand of about 30% and 17% of boys in the higher and the lower caste groups respectively, is always conceded while none of the girls has this privilege in either of the groups. Similarly sharp discrimination has been found in the frequencies of boys and girls (HC: 53.4%; LC: 23.6%) whose demands are 'never' fulfilled in both the caste groups. The GDI values

Table 3: Fulfillment of demands of children

Group		Higher caste				Lower caste				
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Total	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Purchase of Playing Items										
Boys	09 (30.0)	06 (20.0)	08 (26.7)	07 (23.3)	30 (100.0)	05 (16.7)	10 (33.3)	10 (33.3)	05 (16.7)	30 (100.0)
Girls	-	07 (23.3)	07 (23.3)	16 (53.4)	30 (100.0)	-	06 (20.0)	10 (33.3)	14 (46.7)	30 (100.0)
Total	09 (15.0)	13 (21.7)	15 (25.0)	23 (38.3)	60 (100.0)	05 (08.3)	16 (23.7)	20 (33.3)	19 (31.7)	60 (100.0)
χ^2		12.66* (p<0.01, df=3)				10.2* (p<0.02, df=3)				
GDI		Infinite				Infinite				
Extra Time for Playing										
Boys	10 (33.3)	07 (23.3)	06 (20.0)	07 (23.4)	30 (100.0)	09 (30.0)	06 (20.0)	06 (20.0)	09 (30.0)	30 (100.0)
Girls	-	09 (30.0)	11 (36.7)	10 (33.3)	30 (100.0)	05 (16.7)	08 (26.7)	06 (20.0)	11 (36.6)	30 (100.0)
Total	10 (16.7)	16 (26.7)	17 (28.3)	17 (28.3)	60 (100.0)	14 (23.3)	14 (23.3)	12 (20.0)	20 (33.4)	60 (100.0)
χ^2		12.16* (p<0.01, df=3)				1.62 (p>0.01, df=3)				
GDI		Infinite				1.80				
Choice of Food										
Male	07 (23.4)	13 (43.3)	10 (33.3)	-	30 (100.0)	09 (30.0)	09 (30.0)	12 (40.0)	-	30 (100.0)
Female	-	07 (23.3)	09 (30.0)	14 (46.7)	30 (100.0)	-	-	11 (36.7)	19 (63.3)	30 (100.0)
Total	07 (11.7)	20 (33.3)	19 (31.7)	14 (23.3)	60 (100.0)	09 (15.0)	09 (15.0)	23 (38.3)	19 (31.7)	60 (100.0)
χ^2		23.35* (p<0.01, df=3)				38.04* (p<0.01, df=3)				
GDI		Infinite				Infinite				
Choice of Dress										
Boys	-	08 (26.7)	10 (33.3)	12 (40.0)	30 (100.0)	-	06 (20.0)	14 (46.7)	10 (33.3)	30 (100.0)
Girls	-	05 (16.7)	09 (30.0)	16 (53.3)	30 (100.0)	-	-	13 (43.3)	17 (56.7)	30 (100.0)
Total	-	13 (21.7)	19 (31.7)	28 (46.6)	60 (100.0)	-	06 (10.0)	27 (45.0)	27 (45.0)	60 (100.0)
χ^2		1.76 (p>0.05, df=3)				9.26* (p<0.05, df=3)				
GDI		Infinite				Infinite				

* Significant

Figures in parenthesis give the percentage value

also show an absolute male bias, and the differences are also statistically significant ($p < 0.01$, $df=3$) in both the caste groups.

Again, male-female differences do exist for the demand of extra playing time. In the higher caste group the demand for extra time is 'always' conceded in case of more than 33% of boys where as none of the girls enjoy this privilege. On the other hand, in the lower caste group the demand of 30% boys is 'always' fulfilled as against 16.7% of girls. This discrimination is marginal for the other categories in the lower caste. The GDI values show the existence of absolute bias in the higher caste and a marginal discrimination in the lower caste. The difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.1$, $df=3$) for the higher caste and not for the lower caste.

The data related to the choice of food shows absolute male bias in providing the food of choice to the child as frequently demanded (Sen et al. 1983). It also shows that the choice of food for all the male children is valued and is at least 'sometimes', accepted while about 47% and 63% of girls of the higher and lower caste respectively 'never' get the food of their choice on demand. In the lower caste group, the demand for the choice food is 'often' fulfilled for 30% of boys while no girl receives this treatment. The GDI values show absolute male bias in both the groups and the male-female differences are also statistically significant ($p < 0.1$, $df=3$) in both the caste groups.

Table further reveals that the choice of children is normally ignored in case of providing a dress. Nearly 47% of children in the higher caste group and 45% in the lower caste group 'never' get the dress of their choice. The differences in the frequencies of the boys and girls in the higher caste (13.3%) is less than that of the lower caste (23.4%). Moreover, none of the selected child

Table 4: Nature of games

Group	Higher caste			Lower caste		
	Out door	In door	Total	Out door	Indoor	Total
Boys	21 (70.0)	09 (30.0)	30 (100.0)	24 (80.0)	06 (20.0)	30 (100.0)
Girls	07 (23.3)	23 (76.7)	30 (100.0)	11 (36.7)	19 (63.3)	30 (100.0)
Total	28 (46.7)	32 (53.3)	60 (100.0)	35 (58.3)	25 (41.7)	60 (100.0)
χ^2	13.12* ($p < 0.01$, $df=1$)			11.08* ($p < 0.01$, $df=1$)		
GDI	3.00			2.18		

*Significant

Figures in parenthesis give the percentage value

irrespective of gender, 'always' gets the dress of (his/her) choice in both the caste groups. In the higher caste group 16.7% of girls 'often' get the dress of their choice as against 26.7% of boys; this difference is absolute in the lower caste as this demand is fulfilled for 20% of the boys against none of the girls. The GDI values show absolute gender bias in both the study groups but the differences are statistically significant only for the lower caste group ($p < 0.05$, $df=3$).

Table 4 shows that the frequency of boys allowed to play outdoor games is 70% while that of girls is only 23.3% in the higher caste group. The frequencies of the other group shows that more boys (80% and girls (36.7%) are allowed to play outdoor games as compared to the higher caste but male-female differences do exist. For the indoor games a reverse trend is observed. The lower caste girls enjoy more freedom in this regard as compared to the higher caste girls. The GDI values reveal a strong gender bias in both the groups. The values for the higher caste and the lower caste are 3.0 and 2.18 respectively and thus show that the gender discrimination in higher caste group is more than the lower caste group.

Table 5: Permitted time period of play

Group	Higher caste				Lower caste			
	>5 hrs	5-3 hrs	3-1 hrs	Total	>5 hrs	5-3 hrs	3-1 hrs	Total
Boys	11 (36.7)	13 (43.3)	06 (20.0)	30 (100.0)	08 (26.7)	16 (53.3)	06 (20.0)	30 (100.0)
Girls	-	14 (46.7)	16 (63.3)	30 (100.0)	-	17 (56.7)	13 (43.3)	30 (100.0)
Total	11 (18.3)	27 (45.0)	22 (36.7)	60 (100.0)	08 (13.4)	33 (55.2)	29 (48.4)	30 (100.0)
χ^2	15.42* ($p < 0.01$, $df=2$)				13.07* ($p < 0.01$, $df=2$)			
GDI	Infinite				Infinite			

*Significant

Table 5 shows that about 80% of boys in both the caste groups are permitted to play at least up to 3hrs in a day while in case of girls the frequency declines to 47% and 57% in the higher and lower caste groups respectively. Moreover, about 37% boys of the higher caste group and 27% of the lower caste group are allowed to play for more than 5hrs a day while none of the girl is allowed to do so. The differences in the frequencies reveal that the girls of the higher caste are more disadvantaged than the lower caste girls. The GDI values show absolute male bias in both the study groups and the differences are also statistically significant. When inquired for the reason the most frequent reply was "*Ladkiyan itni der kheliyen to ghar ka kaam ko kari?*" i.e. 'if girls will play for such a long time then who will do the household work?' This statement reveals the overburdening of the girl child with the household work at such a tender age. Yanamaka et al. (2002) states that girls worked twice as long as boys and also undertake more heavy works.

Table 6 shows the mode of punishment used in both the caste groups. It is clear that the physical punishment is given more frequently to boys than to girls in both the caste groups whereas the 'verbal' punishment in both the caste groups, is more frequently given to girls but a higher percentage (30%) of them receive 'physical' punishment in the lower caste group

in comparison to the (nearly 23%) higher caste group. 'Restrictions' on various activities are used as a punishment in both the caste groups but the 'psychic' punishment is used exclusively for girls in both the study groups.

In the slum areas the percentage of illness episodes for which no treatment is sought is much higher for females as compared to the males (Sundar et al. 2002). Table 7 depicts an absolute male bias (GDI=Infinity) in providing medical aid to the ailing child in both the caste groups. For 24% of boys in the higher caste group and 17 % of boys in the lower caste group the doctor is consulted on the very first day of illness and certainly before the sickness becomes acute. This facility is totally denied to the girls on the very first day of illness and about 12% of the girls receive medical aid only when the sickness becomes acute. This difference is also statistically significant at 1% level.

It may be concluded on the basis of forgoing analysis that in the both caste groups there exist a male bias. So far as schooling pattern is concerned the bias is manifested more in the higher caste group. The schools situated near the house are preferred for girls and the academic reputation of the school is given a second place, while the pattern is reverse in the case of boys. It indicates a lack of concern for providing the quality education for girls. The demand fulfillment

Table 6: Mode of punishment

Group	Higher caste					Lower caste				
	Physical	Verbal	Restriction	Psychic	Total	Physical	Verbal	Restriction	Psychic	Total
Boys	14 (46.7)	09 (30.0)	07 (23.3)	-	30 (100.0)	17 (56.7)	07 (23.3)	06 (20.0)	-	30 (100.0)
Girls	07 (23.3)	12 (40.0)	05 (16.7)	06 (20.0)	30 (100.0)	09 (30.0)	11 (36.7)	05 (16.7)	05 (16.7)	30 (100.0)
Total	21 (35.0)	21 (35.0)	12 (20.0)	06 (10.0)	60 (100.0)	26 (43.4)	18 (30.0)	11 (18.3)	05 (08.3)	60 (100.0)

Table 7: Time period after which a doctor is consulted for any health problem

Group	Higher Caste					Lower Caste				
	First day	After 1-2 days	After 3-4 days	Acute sickness	Total	First day	After 1-2 days	After 3-4 days	Acute sickness	Total
Boys	08 (26.6)	11 (36.7)	11 (36.7)	-	30 (100.0)	06 (20.0)	18 (60.0)	06 (20.0)	-	30 (100.0)
Girls	-	08 (26.7)	15 (50.0)	07 (23.3)	30 (100.0)	-	10 (33.3)	15 (50.0)	05 (16.7)	30 (100.0)
Total	08 (13.3)	19 (31.7)	26 (43.3)	07 (11.7)	60 (100.0)	06 (10.0)	28 (46.7)	21 (35.0)	05 (08.3)	60 (100.0)
χ^2	16.08* (p<0.01, df=3)					17.12* (p<0.01, df=3)				
GDI	2.37					2.40				

pattern also shows that girls are discriminated in meeting their demand of playing items, extra playing time, and food of choice and dress of choice. The concern for the fulfillment of the demand of the boys and neglect of demands of the girl child instills the role of 'demand' in the boys and that of 'deference' in the girls right from the childhood (Indra et al., 1999). In the higher caste group the demands of girls regarding playing items and extra time for playing is ignored more than that of lower caste girls but regarding food of choice and dress of choice the higher caste girls enjoy a better position than the lower caste girls. So far as the type of games are concerned it is found that girls are normally not allowed to participate in outdoor games whereas the male child is permitted (or, encouraged) to do so in both the study groups. This indicates the restricted mobility of the girl child in the study area. Similarly, absolute male bias is found in the duration of playtime permitted. It points towards the trend of overburdening the girl child with the household work by cutting the playing hours. The caste differences are also eminent as the higher caste girls are discriminated more than the lower caste girls in this regard. In both the study groups physical punishment is more frequently used for the boys while for girls verbal punishment is more frequent. In India despite of the advancement in medical facilities, the girl child is taken to medical center only on the verge of extreme difficulties (Suar, 1994). An absolute male bias is found regarding the access to medical aid on the first day of the sickness, in both the study groups.

Thus, the present study reveals that a strong gender bias exists in this slum area in the treatment meted out with the girl child and the caste factor also has a remarkable influence as it has been found that the girls of the lower caste have a better position than the higher caste girls.

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