

## **Gender Beliefs and Spheres of Discrimination**

### *A Case Study of Village Dasuha, District Faisalabad*

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### **Abstract**

*This article focuses on gender beliefs of the people in a Punjabi village. An effort has been made to show the discriminating attitude of the natives regarding their daughters' upbringing, socialization and education. During the last couple of decades awareness among the people regarding the importance of gender literacy and equality of rights has been created but even then a gender gap prevails. People are still reluctant to give the due rights of their daughters which may include food allocation, inheritance, health, division of labour, economic activities and education. This study identifies the spheres of gender discrimination. The focus of study is to find the actual reason of low participation rate of female education with reference to gender empowerment. The efforts have been made to find out the culture perception of parents regarding their daughter's socialization and gender discrimination between female and male children while their grooming. This research was conducted in Village Dasuha District Faisalabad. Qualitative anthropological techniques were used to collect empirical data.*

**Key Words:** Gender, Discrimination, Inheritance, Patriarchal, Partilineal.

### **Introduction**

Discrimination against the girl child mostly begins even before her birth, when the elderly women say to the expecting mother, "Allah putter devay" (may God give you a son) and prevails throughout her life till death. The discrimination, according to the Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology is, "the differential treatment of persons according to their classification as members of particular categories such as race, sex, age social class etc." It further states that it is distinguished from prejudice, which is the unfavourable or discriminatory attitudes (not actions) towards persons of different categories, Berg (1973) while talking about gender says that, "Gender is a basic category by which the social world is organized. It is the social role of being a female or male."

He says that it is different from sex, which has to do with the biological characteristics of a person, whereas the gender refers to the social creation of girls, boys, women and men. But the assignment of the gender identity and roles is on the basis of physical characteristics in one way or the other like Calhoun, Light and Keller (1994) in their book, "Sociology", say that from the moment a baby is born, it is classified as either a girl or a boy on the basis of physical appearance. They state that biological differences are basic to the destination between male and female. Then they put a rhetoric question that how should people be male or female, because biology leaves a great deal to social construction and answer it by saying that the first time new parents dress their newborn boy in blue and their baby girl in pink, the sexual identity of the child is being socially constructed. According to Calhoun, Light, and Keller, (1994) "Society establishes a set of cultural expectations for each gender; children are taught to conform to what their society expects of them as either a boy or a girl."

Gender discrimination is not a new phenomenon. It was there, when in Arabia, before the advent of Islam, men buried the girl child alive. It is still throbbing in this modern world, when (like in India) female infanticide is being practiced. It prevailed when she was sold in the markets as a slave. It still lingers on when she is trafficked and sold for prostitution. And as if this is not enough, she is criticized, jeered at, and ridiculed in various forms of literature, used as a showpiece in the advertisements and as a colourful, sexy commodity for pleasure in the media.

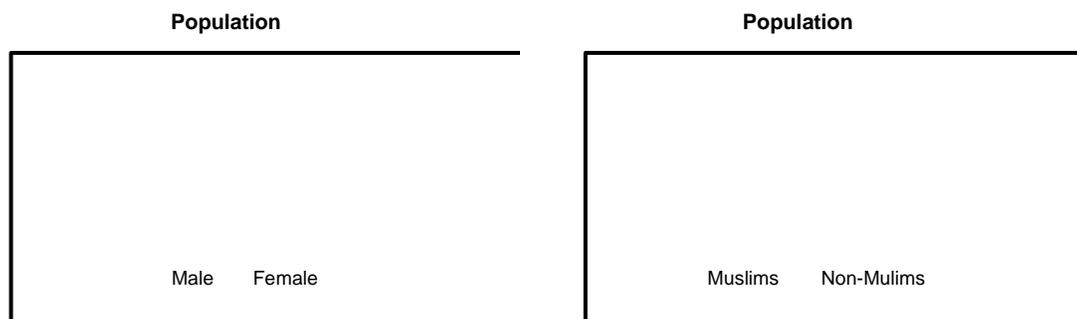
### Locale of study

This study was conducted in Village Dasuha (242-R.B.), District Faisalabad. The village is situated at a distance of 15 km from Faisalabad city in South West direction and 2 km from Samundri road from where a branch road leads to the village. According to 1998 population census report of district Faisalabad the total population of Dasuha is 9,557, which includes 4952 males and 4605 females. This total figure includes 7721 Muslims and 1838 Non-Muslims.

**Table: Population of the Village**

Total Population	Male	Female	Muslim	Non-muslim
9557	4952	4605	7721	1838

**Figure: Population of the Village**



### Research Methodology

During our research we use simple random sampling for socio-economic survey. One hundred households were selected for this purpose. Before starting the interviews we stayed in the village, visited and communicated with people for the first week of our research for establishment of rapport which is usually the primary and crucial step in anthropological research. It is the way and manner in which the researcher enters the community and develops contacts with the community members. During this first week of our rapport building we choose two key informants in the village on our personal judgment basis, which knew most of the people in the village and their socio-economic conditions. We used participant observation in order to get first hand and accurate information about the sampled families. In addition we participated in the daily activities of women and girls. Moreover we attended the ceremonies like marriages and engagements etc.

Un-structured interviews were conducted with the elder members of society such as mothers, grandmothers, and maternal/paternal aunts, of the students. This is an informal and comparatively less restricting way of extracting information from the interviewees. Structured Interviews were used to interview the teachers of different schools both for girls and boys and other government/non-governmental officials. The reason for this was that these people tended to take the interview more seriously and give reasonably accurate answers. Another reason for its use was that we did not have informal relationship with them. The questionnaires were used while conducting the interviews with them. The questions that formed our questionnaire were simple direct and open-ended since these were self-administered questionnaires.

Case study method was also used during our research to get detailed data related to some sequence of event or set of events to draw some theoretical conclusions. The individual case studies conducted in the village were formulated on the pattern of multiple case-designs. These case studies were conducted to trace gender biases existing in family regarding education.

## **Results and Discussion**

In the villages, under the traditional gender division of labour, girls and women are expected to maintain the household, care for children and old and sick members of the family, also, to participate in the economic activities of the household (usually within the household) without remuneration. Men, on the other hand, are expected to earn income and to protect the family from violence of the outsiders. The social spheres are separated into male or public domain, and female or private domain. Relations of power, subordination and dependency or "patriarchy" maintain the gender relations. Rubina Saigol's statement, which is actually about the domestic knowledge system, supports the above verdict, she says,

Saigol (1994) quoted, "This system thus draws upon patriarchal divisions between the public and private and personal and political and in these divisions the men occupy the public/political space while women occupy the private/political realm. However, masculine norms and requirements govern and dominate the so-called feminine sphere".

The domestic knowledge system, according to Saigol, relies on a series of binary distinctions such as good/bad, virtue/vice, high/low, superior/inferior, right/wrong and these divisions follow the patriarchal logic of assigning positive and higher values to men and negative and lower, usually exactly opposite values to women. These positioning become markers of gender identity.

Gender discrimination, the age-old system of inequality and stereotyping of the role of women, has resulted in the low valuation of a girl child. The parents always pray for a son. This perhaps is the attitude all over the country with a few honourable exceptions. The situation may be worse in the villages where when the girl is born, there is seldom any joy; a kind of gloom prevails; but the birth of a boy is greeted with elation and pride.

According to Seymour (1986) "Gender has been used to refer to the social, cultural and psychological patterning of differences between males and females. It is differentiated from sex, sex is biological phenomenon and gender is a cultural classification that allows for the separation of the biological and cultural aspects of differences between males and females."

According to Rehman and Biswal (1993) "Education is an important indicator of women's development. It is also an important instrument for attaining economic power and dependence. However, educational opportunities available today have not been shared equally by both men and women; as compared to men, women have been benefited much less from educational opportunities across different regions of the world."

Kumari, Singh and Dubey (1990) stated, "These girls, as we have seen, are socialized to play expressive roles, i.e. social roles within the private domain of the family, unlike their brothers who are trained to play the instrumental roles, i.e. to take up the responsibility of productive functions in the public domain. May be this role expectation leads to discrimination vis-à-vis the 'productive members' of the family."

According to UNESCO Report on universal primary education (1987), "In Pakistan the attitude towards women as inferior beings is visible from the birth of a girl, which is greeted with guilt or despair on the part of the mother, shame or anger on the part of the father, and the general concern and commiseration of the entire circle of friends and family."

Devasia and Devasia (1991) pointed out, "The process of socializing of children starts in the family and women in a family are partners to deep-rooted female bias, whereby girls and women are given secondary status than the boys and male members. When a girl sees her mother looking after household chores like cleaning, washing, cooking, baby-care etc. being the last to eat food and to deprive herself of all comforts of life, she also imbibes these values...."

Rosaldo (1974) says, "Men busy themselves dealing with the outside world they depend upon women to keep things running smoothly at home...(which) involves a problem of control...Exaggerated values of male supremacy are linked with mechanism of female suppression."

According to Kazi and Sathar (1991) "The primary role of women is viewed as mother and wives and most often women in Pakistan derive their status from their male kin.

There is a conventional division of responsibility between men and women: economic provision is the responsibility of the men while women must procreate and raise children."

Brophy (1977) says, "Boys are treated differently from girls from birth... In the early months/ these differences show up in the color of clothing and bedroom decor...and in differential behaviour by the parents (different toys given to boys vs. girls; boys treated more roughly and physically and girls treated more gently and verbally)"

Zanden and Wilfred (1990) pointed out "It seems that all societies have used the anatomical difference between men and women to assign gender roles, sets of cultural expectations that define the ways in which the members of each sex should behave. Gender roles represent the earliest division of labour among human beings. We all are born into societies with well established cultural guidelines for the behavior of men and of women."

Hafeez (1981) stated, "Legally the job opportunities structure for women is egalitarian. Women can take up almost any type of a job. Bias or discrimination exists and is practiced on a conventional level. Women in Pakistan are nurtured by their parents to believe that the teaching profession is highly desirable for them. They do not have any source of career guidance, which would give them a belief in the desirability of other professions."

The discrimination at the behavioral level is actually steered by the discriminatory beliefs, which were found in the village too. There is a great difference between the people's ideas and beliefs about the girls and boys. According to the majority of respondents, the girls should not shout, their voice should not cross the boundaries of the house. The general idea is that the girls are more obedient than boys, i.e. "*ziada kayna manian*" (more obedient). The boys, on the other hand, are believed to be very naughty and that they can't be stopped from shouting "*jaddun mood wich hon*" (when they are in a mood) then nobody can stop them except their fathers and elder brothers. A number of my informants believe that girls are more "*zimmadar*" (responsible) and that "*dhian lissian hondian nay*" (daughters are soft natured, and weaker) and that "*puttur daday hondian nay*" (daughters are soft natured, and weaker).

It is considered very bad in the village to ask the consent of girl in favour or against her marriage. The girl who herself talks against or in favour of her marriage or groom is considered "*bayghairat*" (shameless). Many respondents said that people don't tolerate others talking about their daughters, sisters, wives or even mothers. It is considered as a "*gunah*" (sin) for "*jawan*" (young) girls to come in front of "*namehram banday*" (stranger men) without "*pardah*" (females hide themselves from stranger males).

About the boys, a large number of the respondents gave statements like, "*ooh hakam nay*" (they are the rulers) and about girls they said, "*manwan payouan, bhirawan fay shoheran diyau nauker hondian nay*" (the girls and women are the servants of their parents, brothers, and then in-laws) and that they should be acquainted with their household chores. About the sons most of the people said that they are important because they earn money and are the supporters of the family, "*mann payo da sahara hondian nay*" (support for their parents) and daughters are somebody else's property, "*dhiyan paraya maal hondian nay*" (daughters are somebody else's property). Here it is to be noted that the daughters are being referred as "*maal*" (wealth (term used for the livestock or property etc)) which is the term used for the livestock or property etc. The discrimination against girls is quite obvious as they are considered as some material thing or possession, which is to be handed over to the others. In other words we can say they are the property, which belong to others, whereas boys are the rulers, authority bearers and a source of strength and support for the family. People train their daughters keeping in mind that they have to go to "*paray ghaar*" (others' house (the house of the husband and his family)) and have to know every thing about household work "*neheen tay maran khandian*" (otherwise they get beaten up).

Majority of the respondents believed that the girls should be obedient "*kayna manen walian*" (obedient) tolerant "*sabar walian*" (tolerant) and should take care of the "*izzat*" (honour/repute) of their family. Many women said that "*dhiyan day naseeban toon der lagda*", "*dhiyan day muqadran toon der lagda*" (they are afraid of the fate of their daughters). The birth of the son, I was told by many respondents, is celebrated and sweetmeats are distributed whereas that of a girl is not celebrated, normally people don't say "*mubarak howay*" (congratulations) to the parents whose daughter is born. People on such occasions say alas! It would have been better if a boy may have born; he could have become the 'arm' (support and bread winner) for the family.

People get worried on the birth of a girl because she is a "*bohat waddi zimmadari*" (very big responsibility) for the family as the family's "*izzat*" (honour) has to be protected (referring to their chastity/virginity and so the honour of the family) and she has to be married for which a lot of dowry is required. The son is considered as the guardian of the house.

The sons are the symbols of strength of the family. Subsequently, they also earn money and support their family. Daughters on the other hand, are considered as the symbol of weakness "*kamzori di neshani*" (symbol of weakness) of the family. The sons are preferred because they bring wife and dowry; the daughter however, goes as a wife and takes the dowry to somebody else's house.

The parents are also considered to be in a weaker position when the daughter is married off, as one of the key informants said that if daughters are not happy in their husbands' house, they are the parents who become in trouble, depressed, hurt and upset. The elderly, women were often seen praying for me and the girls in these words "*Allah khush rakhay*" (may God keep you happy), "*Allah purday rakhay*" (may God keep you covered). This shows the importance of the concept of honour and respect (chastity) of girls. Many women said that daughters should be flexible, as they have to survive in their husband's house. People believe that girls should observe "*pardah*" because by doing so, the men and boys don't stare at their faces and don't follow or chase them. Sentences like "girls need to be taken great care of", and "girls have to be kept under watch", were repeated again and again.

According to a number of respondents, girls are not usually told about menstrual, periods before they start taking place. Mothers hesitate to talk about such issues because they feel shame i.e. "*haya*" (shame). Therefore, sometimes, when their periods start they think they have done something wrong or have become cancer patients or seriously ill.

Many respondents said that girl's dealings and behaviour towards others should be nice and she should be tolerant, enduring and caring. The reasons behind the discriminatory behaviour towards girl child are summarized in the following table:

#### Reasons for the Preference of a Son

Why a son?	Why not a daughter?
Provides economic support and old age security.	Heavy responsibility to protect her from dangers like the degradation of family's " <i>izzat</i> " (honour).
Transfer of property.	Dowry has to be given.
Permanent members of the family.	Temporary members of family, as they have to leave after marriage.
Perpetuation of lineage.	Symbol of family's weakness.

#### Spheres of Discrimination

**Birth:** The birth is the time, when parents welcome the arrival of the newborn, nevertheless in Dasuha the situation is a bit discriminatory in terms that if the baby is a male, he is welcomed with feasts, congratulations and exchange of gifts etc. but the gloomy part of the whole scenario turns out to be the birth of the girl child. If she is the first one in the family, the parents/grand parents may not bewail her birth but a depressive silence prevails and nobody dares to congratulate the family, but if she is born after two or three sisters, then the family members even tend to scream and cry. On such occasion the mother also becomes the victim of the criticism, scolding, ill treatment, even beatings at the hands of the husband and the in-laws.

**Food Allocation:** Food is the basic need, which is required by all living beings for survival. Discriminatory behaviour of the villagers in the allocation of food resources was observed in majority of the cases. Although it is the girls and women who prepare the food, wash the dishes, and serve the meals to the family but it is the male members i.e. men and boys (if present in the house) who get the food first, which is the best part of the food i.e. if it is a meat dish, men are served the meat pieces of their choice, and when they are finished up with it, only then the women and girls start having it, i.e. eat the left-over food. Majority of the respondents admitted that (under normal circumstances) the males are served food before females. Sometimes before distributing the food, its major share is kept for men if they are not at home, so that whenever they come back, that share may be served to them.

**Inheritance:** Although according to Islamic Law, the women and girls are entitled to inherit the land and property, in which they get half of the male's share and the Pakistan's secular or judicial law also advocates women's share in the property, but the traditional practice prevalent in the village deprives them from their legal share in land according to which women are supposed to hand over their share of land in favour of their brothers. The common perception is that the girl is given her share of property in the form of dowry, and if the girl is given her share of land, then she'll take it to her husband's family and the family's property will go out of the hands of the actual owners. Many people think that a woman should be offered her share in the property, but she should not take it, because if she would not take her part in the land then her brothers and parents will take care of her throughout her life. In case of any disaster or catastrophe like the husband's death or maladjustment with the husband or in-laws resulting in separation or divorce, she has to go to her parents and brothers, who support her throughout her life. If she doesn't take her share in the land then her parents and brothers keep on giving her money or gifts on different occasions like Eid, birth of children, marriage of siblings or children, and gets a sack of grain at the time of harvest. On the contrary, if she does claim her share then she might face social boycott from her family of orientation, because it results in hurting and enraging them so much that they don't take her responsibility anymore. The property of the women, who do not have brothers, doesn't remain in their fathers' family. It becomes a part of their husbands' family and successors. Therefore the women too think it as a fair custom. Some of the respondents said that land (zameen) is like mother and nobody wants his land in that respect to go in others' family.

**Health:** In lower as well as middle classes the preference is given to the males in this sphere. The girls are treated locally whereas the boys may be taken to the doctor, especially in the low-income families in which more than two daughters are present, the boy's life is more important as compared to the girls. The common ailments like cold, cough etc. are treated locally. The patients may be taken to the local doctor at the most or some "taveez" (amulet) might be brought from the peer, or the patient may be taken to the peer for "dam durood" (Quranic verses or the names of God are recited under the breath and then blown on the person). In upper class the discrimination was not observed in this sphere. Whether the patients are males or females, they are treated equally i.e. taken to the hospital 'in Faisalabad, as they can afford it.

**Division of Labour:** The division of labour is based on the classic principle of public and private dichotomy. The work inside the house is supposed to be for the females, whereas the work involving outside mobility is the duty of male members of the society. A male is considered to be the main source of income. He works in the fields or employed somewhere else to win bread and butter for the family. The males usually get up in the morning, get ready, have their breakfast and go out to work, and come back in the afternoon for lunch. After that they are usually free to spend their time in leisure, or to go to meet their male friends and relatives. Men and boys get together and discuss the daily events or politics. The young boys usually help the family by bringing the fodder for the livestock from the fields or grocery, and things for everyday needs. The only males visible inside the houses during the daytime are very young boys and those who are too old to work and in need of care.

The usual day of a woman begins with work and ends with work. She gets up very early in the morning, prepares the breakfast, and serves it to the family members. After having breakfast she sweeps the house, makes the beds. Her daughter usually helps her by sharing the chores like washing the utensils and clothes, kneading the flour, preparing food for lunch and by taking care of the young ones if any. If she is studying in the school, then she gets ready and goes to the school.

She also does crotchet work and embroidery on the sheets and pillowcases etc. for her dowry or as labour for the middleman and thus helping the family economically. Then in the afternoon the food is served to the family members. After having food, people have some rest in the summers but in winters as the days are short, dishes are washed and tea is prepared and served to the family members. After tea, the food is prepared for dinner and while having the dinner, people watch television dramas or news. After the dinner, the kitchen is cleaned, leftover things are taken care of, utensils are washed, and beds are made. Then some girls start doing the embroidery and crotchet work again, those girls who are students do their homework and are usually the last ones (like their mothers) to go to sleep. The females usually keep on talking and gossiping while doing the household chores. Some girls were seen watching television programmes, or listening to the radio, especially while doing crotchet work or embroidery.

**Economic Activities:** Economic activities of the girls are restricted due to “*purdah*” limitation, which confines them within the bounds of the houses. Home associated work is then a convenient choice and with that comes the handicraft of embroidery and crochet work, appropriate expertise for which is adequately acquired by majority of the girls of Dasuha who utilize it for making their dowry items. Thus besides doing the household work the majority of girls, in particular from lower income group also help the family by earning money through the sale of crochet work, embroidered and stitched items to the middleman who visits their homes and buys their output at dirt cheap rates. Sheer exploitation of home bound girls of Dasuha. The embroidery is done on the bed sheets, cushion covers, table and sofa cover cloth, the covering sheets of suitcases and boxes for their own dowry also.

**Education:** “Low-income family cannot afford enough money to educate their children, so they choose their son for higher education. It is fact that the bringing up a child by an educated mother is superior to by an uneducated mother. Awareness about the importance of female education is not a new phenomenon. But there is gap present between male and female child in literacy. Literacy rate vary from region to region as well as in case of sex. For instance, literacy rate in rural areas are lower as compared to urban areas. Similarly, female literacy rates are lower as compared to those of male.” (Ghafoor, 1994).

In the village, generally the parents deal with their male and female child separately. The sons are preferred over the daughters because they are supposed to be the helping hand for the parents. Parents tend to think that whatever they spent on sons is an investment because in their old age they would be able to depend on their sons where as spending over daughters is a waste, because they are considered as liabilities and there is a concept of not being dependent on the daughters. Depending on the daughters is treated as an insult in the society. “*Purdah*” is another reason. It is because they feel that their honour is at stake.

### **Conclusion**

The human child is the most helpless creature of the world immediately after his birth. He or she is totally at the mercy of their parents. The people of Dasuha have different set of rules and regulations for their newly born babies regarding their upbringing, socialization and education. People are relectant to give the due rights of their daughters which may include food allocation, inheritance, health, division of labour, economic activities and education. Birth of a male child is always celebrated with cheers and festivity. He always enjoys a complete freedom to develop and grow in any direction of his desires and capabilities but arrival of girl child is met with a chilled hush. A life stuffed with suppressed sentiments and subdued existence awaits her. The stamp of second-class citizen is embossed on her soul in the name of love, concern and security.

Majority of the parents treat their children differently. Within the family mother plays a major role in this differentiation. The pregnant women always wish to give birth to a son and all the other women known to her also prey for the same. After giving birth to a son the mother thinks of herself as a great woman who has given birth to a man because this man will continue the lineage of his father.

The females even managing the whole of household work are supposed as doing their routine work. The data shows that the males and females in the patriarchal Punjabi society are not rewarded equally for what they do. Females are the ones who suffer most. They do contribute in the family income in one way or the other but still their contribution is not considered as an extra work. The literacy level of the population shows that the women are the one who are less educated. Therefore, they are not given their due rights in the society as they cannot protest in getting their rights. The males do not accept this that the females are equivalent to them.

Despite the rigid customs and traditions which are being followed by the villagers, certain changes have also taken place, like “*purdah*” these days is not as strict as it was in past. In the past the women had to wear a thick “*burkha*” (a type of gown women use to wear to hide their face and body) from very young ages but now the girls have started wearing “*chadders*” (scarf/shawl). Then the girls and women only used to go out to meet their relatives during nighttime and that too with male companions, but now this practice is very rare. Now they can even go during the daytime. The girls go to schools and “*madrassas*” (Institutes for religious education) etc. and women can also be seen as L.H.Vs and L.H.Ws so this trend has changed. Changes have also been observed in the health issues, as the people are gaining greater awareness about health, family planning and related issues through the Lady Health Visitors and media. The people have started taking their females to the hospitals.

A change has also appeared in context of education too. In the past people didn't even allow their daughters to study, but now they have started getting their daughters educated. Most of my respondents said that it's because of media. People have been made aware that it is as important for daughters to get education as it is for boys. There are many girls who were not allowed to study in the past but now their younger sisters are being sent to school by their parents. There was a time when girls were not allowed to speak against any order of their parents, especially fathers, uncles and brothers. But now it was observed that girls have started speaking against not being allowed to study further, I've seen some girls who are getting higher education by force. Some girls although are not educated themselves, but have made their parents send their younger sisters to schools.

Although these are only few of the aspects in which change was seen but these changes were seen in majority of the families. Although the pace of social change is extremely slow but it is happening, showing that the rural society is not static and exposure to media and interaction with the urban community has also affected the Dasuha society in some ways. But the harsh reality still holds a strong position as the girls of Dasuha, which is a fusion point of Punjabi Culture, are living in a conservative patriarchal and patrilineal society where they are assigned with the roles of a domestic worker expected to be submissive, chaste, "purdah" observing, dowry making and ready to be wed off and to nicely settle down in the house of their in laws. A little education with full devotion to household works in order to care and look after the members of the family in a docile and submissive manner is the normal life schedule of most of Dasuha girls who are groomed to accept the dominance of men as father, brother and husband.

This study also highlights the fact that a conscious and persistent effort is to be made to educate the society about the equal status of males and females. The girls are to be allowed to get educated so that they can have the confidence to face the world. The parents should have flexible attitude towards their children as it affects the life and personality of the children.

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