

Perceptions of millennials of twenty first century regarding position of women in Pakistani society

Hana Javed (1)
Tafazzul Hyder Zaidi (2)
Kiran Mehtab (3)

(1) Undergraduate Medical Student, Sindh Medical College, Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Karachi

(2) Associate Professor, Community Medicine Department, Sindh Medical College, Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Karachi

(3) Professor and Head Of Department, Department of Community Medicine, Liaquat College of Medicine & Dentistry, Karachi

Corresponding author:

Dr Syed Tafazzul Hyder Zaidi MBBS, MSPH
Associate Professor, Community Medicine Department,
Sindh Medical College, Jinnah Sindh Medical University,
Karachi

Cell No: 00 92 300 923 26 95

Email: Drtaf2002@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Introduction: Millennials is a term referring to the people born between 1981–2000. Members of this demographic cohort are known as millennials because they were born around the turn of the third millennium A.D. This generation is generally associated with heightened technical knowledge and most of their active hours are spent on social media. It is a generation which claims to break all stereotypes engrained into our minds by society in the name of “culture”.

Seeing that the reason for women being discriminated within households revolves around the closed, backward concepts of dowry and patriarchy, we targeted an audience of extremely privileged, well educated, socially and culturally aware university students to determine their view point on the issue at hand.

Objective : To determine the perceptions of millennials of twenty first century regarding position of women in Pakistani society in Karachi.

Material and method: A Cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of 330 participants from various universities of Karachi. The study was conducted for a period of ten months from February 2019 To November 2019 .The Data was collected from Aligarh Institute of Technology, Bahria University,

DHA Suffa University and Institute of Business Administration Karachi. The sample was taken through Non-Probability Purposive Sampling. A Pilot study was conducted to assess the authenticity of the questionnaire. Data collected was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 20, with 95% confidence interval. All ethical considerations were observed.

Results: Regarding faculties of the participants, 48.2% were from Engineering, 17.6% from Commerce, 3.3% from Arts and 30% from other fields. 100% of them were single. 65.5% of our participants thought women in Pakistan are treated differently than men of the same society. 89.1% thought mothers of sons get more respect in family matters and decision making than mothers of daughters while 10.9% thought they didn't. 85.2% of the participants believe women in Pakistan get treated differently if they become pregnant with daughters as compared to sons. When asked to specify what they meant by being treated differently, 16.97% said that society makes daughter bearing women feel bad, 34.85% thought society made them feel like they are bringing a burden into this world, 22.42% felt that the same level of health care wasn't provided to such women whereas 25.76% felt that women carrying daughters were treated better than those carrying sons. Only 3.6% of participants said that they would have a softer spot for a woman if she were having a boy, 7.6% said they would have a softer spot if she were having a girl, 24.8% said it wouldn't matter,

61.5% would care for any expecting woman while 2.4% would not care for any. When asked which parent can naturally decide the gender of a child 58% had misconceptions. 83.33% said men should not remarry a second or third time if they were having only daughters from their first marriage, 4.24% said men should be allowed to do so without prejudice and 12.42% refrained from sharing their point of view. When asked about their ideal family, 5.5% said only 1 child (daughter), 2.1% said only 1 child (son), 87% said both sons and daughters, 2.1% said only sons and 3.3% said they would ideally want only daughters.

Conclusion: The youth of Pakistan are well aware of the social stigmas around them. Even our targeted audience that comprised people living in urban areas have grown up seeing women mistreated for bearing daughters, but our study shows that this generation has realized the fault of their ancestors and there is hope that these young adults would bring a positive change in the future.

Key words: Perceptions, millennial, women status, Pakistani society

Introduction

The Urban Dictionary defines "Mum" as, "The woman who loves you unconditionally from birth, the one who puts her kids before herself and the one who you can always count on above everyone else."

But unfortunately according to a study conducted by Sunita Puri in The U.S (who studied immigrant Indians) in 2011, "40% of the women interviewed had terminated prior pregnancies with female fetuses and that 89% of women carrying female fetuses in their current pregnancy pursued an abortion" (1).

Seeing this drastic difference between what the place of a mother is in a child's life and what are the common practices against female fetuses, one is intrigued to look further into the matter.

The main question arises; why would a person, who is biologically programmed to love the child growing inside them, suddenly decide to take its life away, just because that child is another female like herself?

Or maybe that's what scares her the most, bringing another life into this world that would be doomed to the same gender discrimination that she faced her entire life. According to a study published in 2016, "The immense value placed on male children around the world, especially among patriarchal cultures in developing countries like Nigeria, has resulted in unfavorable disposition towards the continuous birth and welfare of females" (2).

According to a study conducted by Farah Qadir et al in Pakistan in 2011, "In Pakistan, preference for boys over girls is deeply culturally embedded. From birth, many women experience gendered disadvantages; less access to scarce resources, poorer health care, higher child mortality, limited education, less employment outside of the home and circumscribed autonomy." The same study further stated that "Boys carry the family name, can continue the family trade, and are expected to provide for their parents in old age. Married women typically live with their in-laws, and are expected to provide care and support to their husband's parents in their old age. Married sons

are therefore a virtual necessity in countries with no state pension or welfare support for frail older persons" (3).

According to a study by Nithin Kumar et al published in 2014 in India. "Various factors that can be attributed to the decline in sex-ratio include increased sex selective female abortions, and female feticide." The study also states that, "The main reason for female feticide is based on a common perception that the female child is an economic burden on the family due to dowry problems and vulnerability of them for sexual harassment, whereas males carry out family business and support parents at a later age" (4).

According to a study by R. Kansal et al in India in 2010, the birth of female child is perceived as a curse with economic and social liability. The proliferation and abuse of advanced technologies coupled with social factors such as dowry, concerns with family name and looking up to the son as a breadwinner (5).

According to a Study conducted by Srivastav Shalini et al in India in 2011, "desire for male child manifests so blatantly that parents have no qualms about repeated, closely spaced pregnancies, premature deaths and even terminating a child before it is born" (6). According to a study conducted in Pakistan in 2015 psychological antenatal depression was very common in that country because of the constant ongoing stress faced by women (7). According to another study in Pakistan the findings showed that gender discrimination was not uniform in intensity and nature across the educated Pakistani society and there was neither any evidence of socio economic status nor of religiosity of men who were discriminating against women (8). According to another study there was a marked difference in educating children on the basis of gender. It was observed that due to the higher cost of private schooling and less availability of government schools within the community, parents are more reluctant to enroll their daughters in private schools because parents were somewhat less willing to invest in girls' schooling compared to boys due to cultural constraints (9).

According to a study in India the level of education of parents did make a difference in nutritional status of girls (10).

Considering how concepts like dowry and daughters being given off forever to her husband's family seem illiterate and old fashioned, it was important to find out how the educated people of Pakistan today perceive the status of women around them today. This study aims to provide an insight into the thoughts of Millennials regarding core issues like patriarchy and the status of women in Pakistani society.

Objective

To determine attitudes and practices of millennials of the twenty first century regarding position of women in Pakistani society in Karachi.

Material and method

A Cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of 330 participants from various universities of Karachi. The study was conducted for a period of ten months from February 2019 To November 2019 .The data was collected from Aligarh Institute of Technology, Bahria University, DHA Suffa University and Institute of Business Administration Karachi. The sample was taken through non-probability purposive sampling. A Pilot study was conducted to assess the authenticity of the questionnaire. Data collected was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 20, with 95% confidence interval. All ethical considerations were observed.

Results

Regarding faculties of the participants, 48.2% were from Engineering, 17.6% from Commerce, 3.3% from Arts and 30% from other fields. 100% of them were single. 65.5% of our participants thought women in Pakistan are treated differently than men of the same society. 89.1% thought mothers of sons get more respect in family matters and decision making than mothers of daughters while 10.9% thought they didn't. 85.2% of the participants believe women in Pakistan get treated differently if they become pregnant with daughters as compared to sons. When asked to specify what they meant by being treated differently, 16.97% said that society makes daughter bearing women feel bad, 34.85% thought society made them feel like they are bringing a burden into this world, 22.42% felt that the same level of health care wasn't provided to such women whereas 25.76% felt that women carrying daughters were treated better than those carrying sons. Only 3.6% of participants said that they would have a softer spot for a woman if she were having a boy, 7.6% said they would have a softer spot if she were having a girl, 24.8% said it wouldn't matter, 61.5% would care for any expecting woman while 2.4% would not care for any. When asked which parent can naturally decide the gender of a child 58% had misconceptions. 83.33% said men should not remarry a second or third time if they were having only daughters from their first marriage, 4.24% said men should be allowed to do so without prejudice and 12.42% refrained from sharing their point of view. When asked about their

ideal family, 5.5% said only 1 child (daughter), 2.1% said only 1 child (son), 87% said both sons and daughters, 2.1% said only sons and 3.3% said they would ideally want only daughters.

Figure 1 shows faculties of the participants as; 48.2% from Engineering, 17.6% from Commerce, 3.3% from Arts and 30% from other fields.

Figure 1

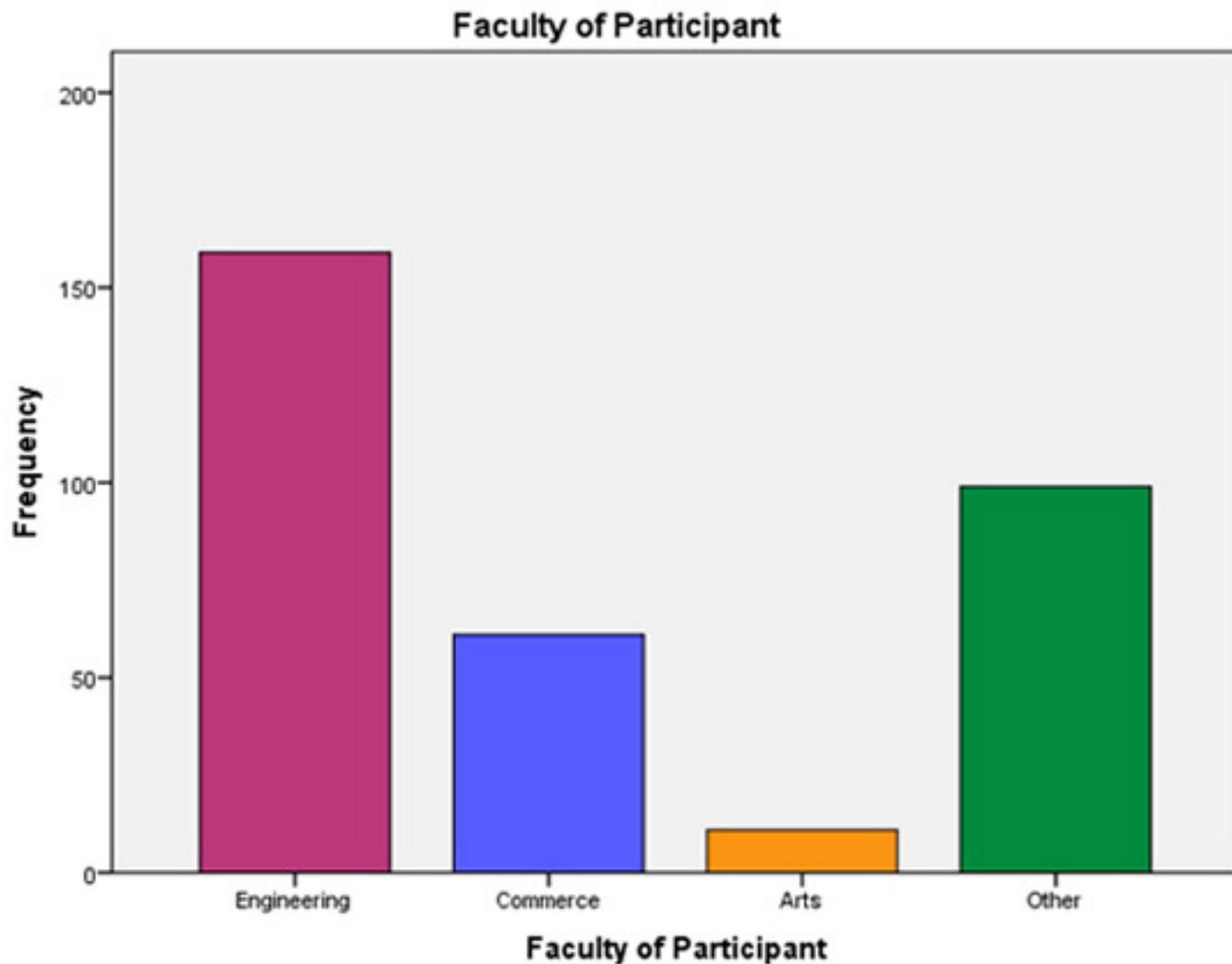


Figure 2 shows 65.5% of our participants think women in Pakistan are treated differently than men of the same society.

Figure 2

Do you think women are treated any differently in Pakistani society than men?

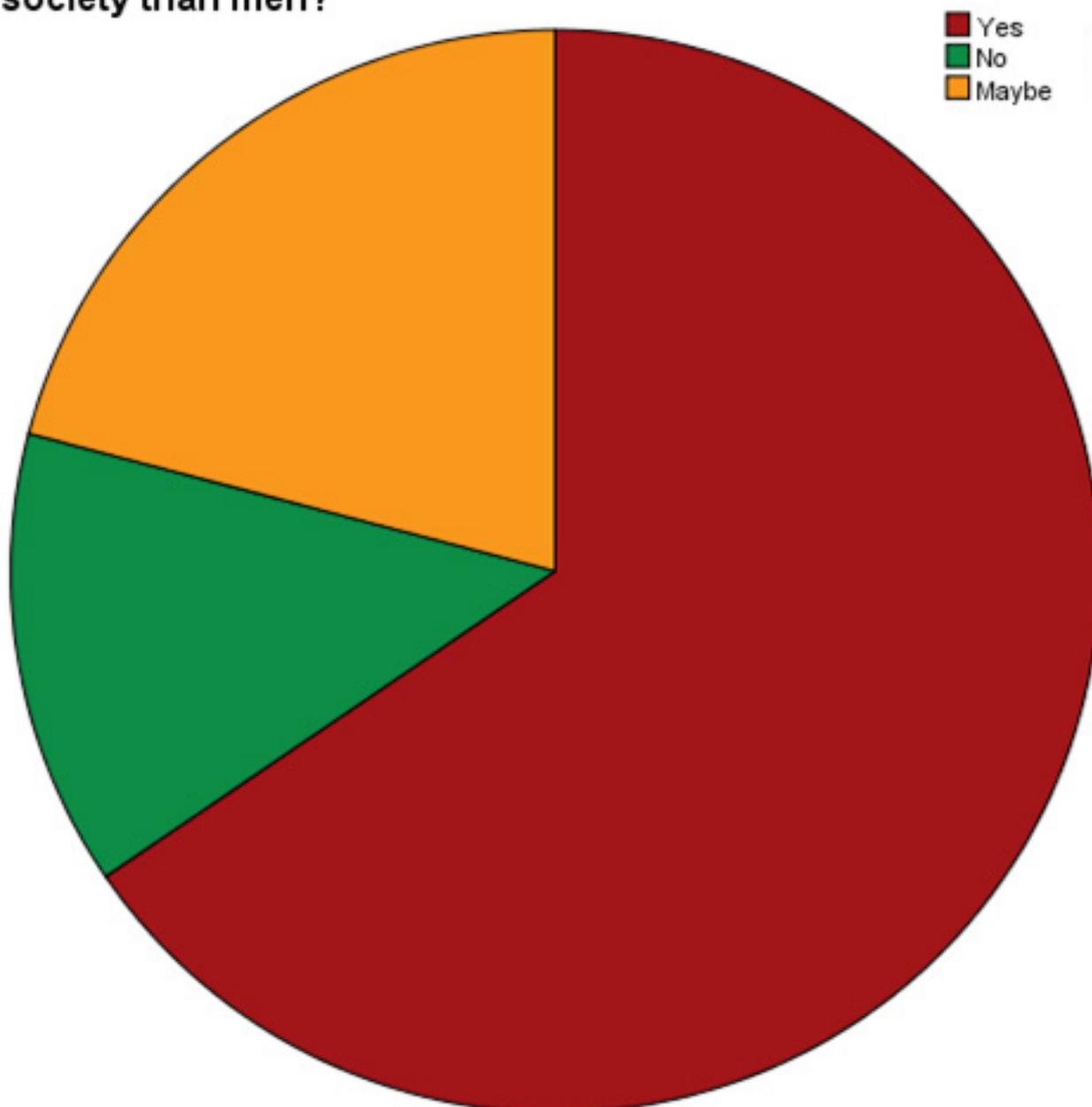


Figure 3 shows that 89.1% of our audience believes that mostly in Pakistani society today, mothers of sons get more respect in family matters and decision making than mothers of daughters.

Figure 3

Do you think that in Pakistani society today, mothers of sons get more respect in family matters and decision making than mothers of daughters?

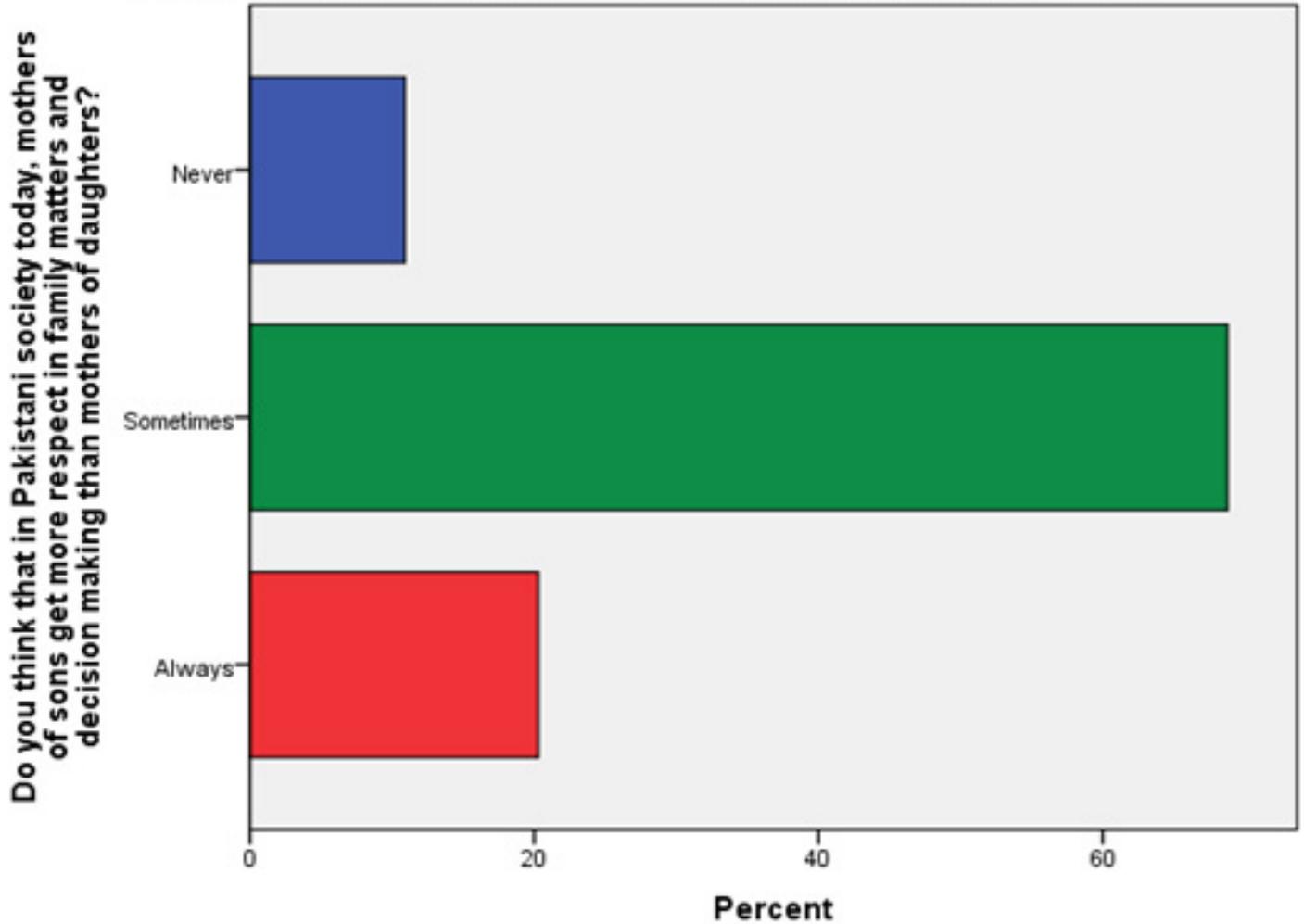


Figure 4 shows that 85.2% of the participants believe women in Pakistan get treated differently if they become pregnant with daughters as compared to sons.

Figure 4

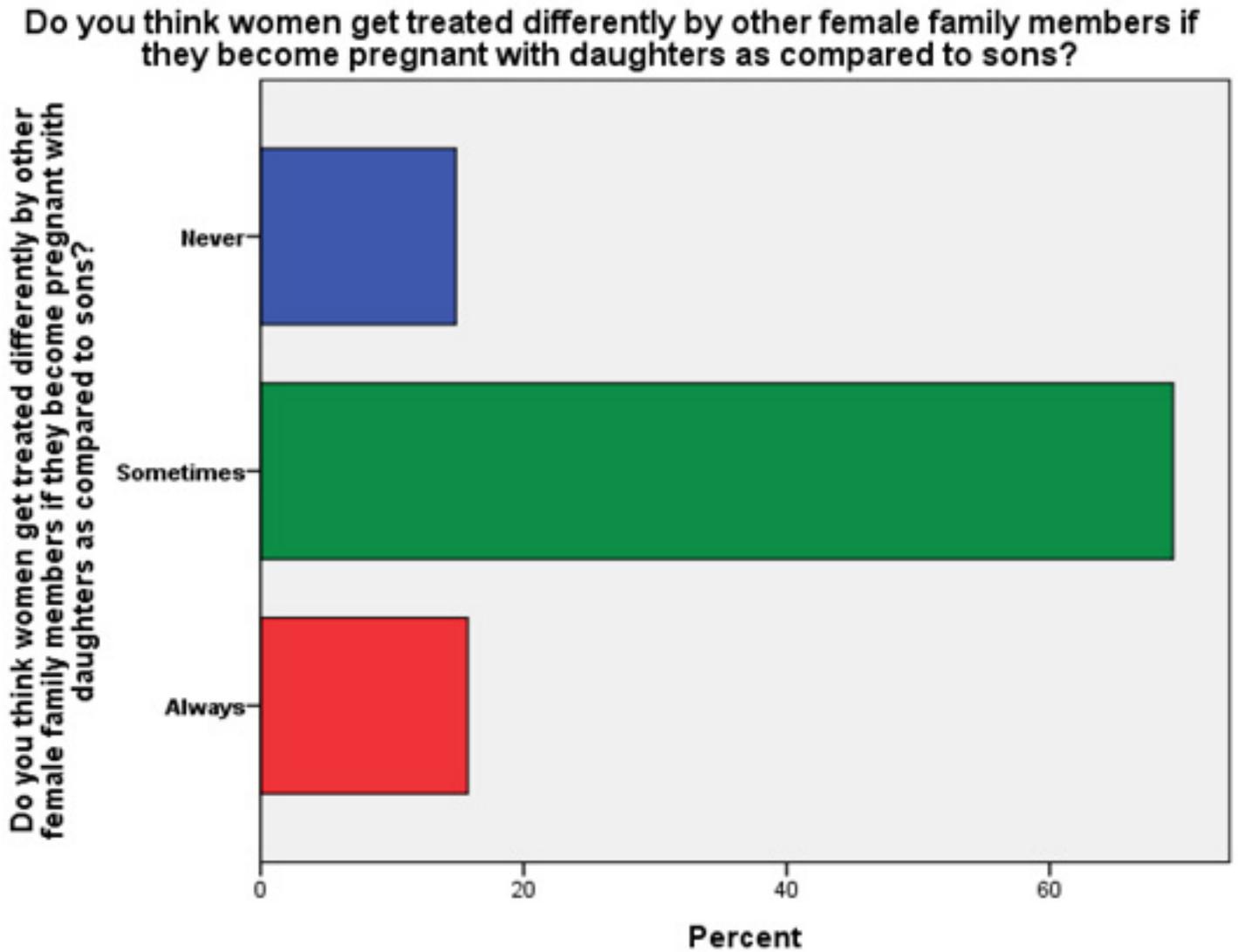


Figure 5 shows that 74.2% of the participants believe that women get treated badly if they become pregnant with daughters.

Figure 5

How do you think women get treated if they become pregnant with daughters?

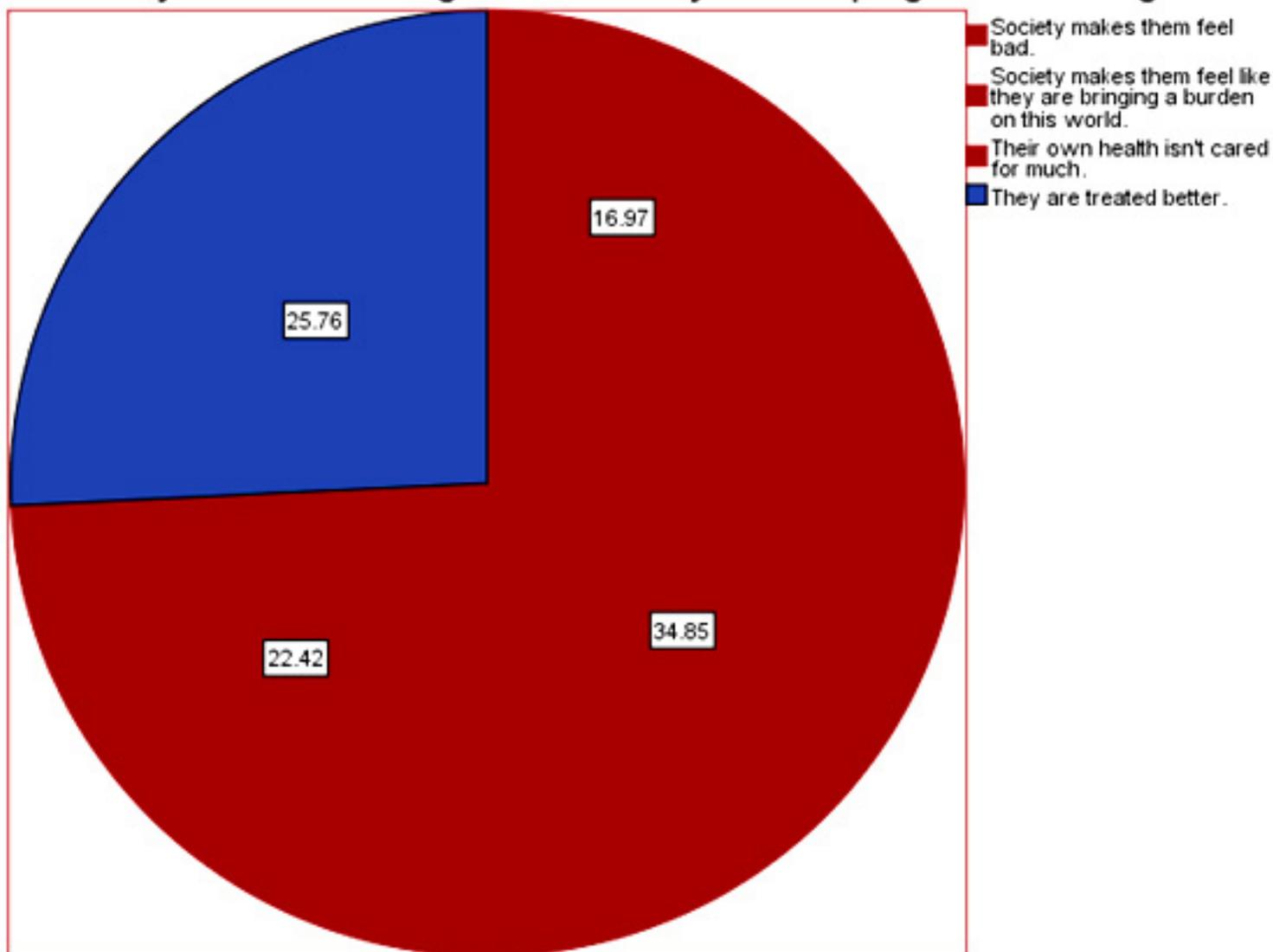


Figure 6 shows that 3.6% of participants said that they would have a softer spot for a woman if she were having a boy.

Figure 6

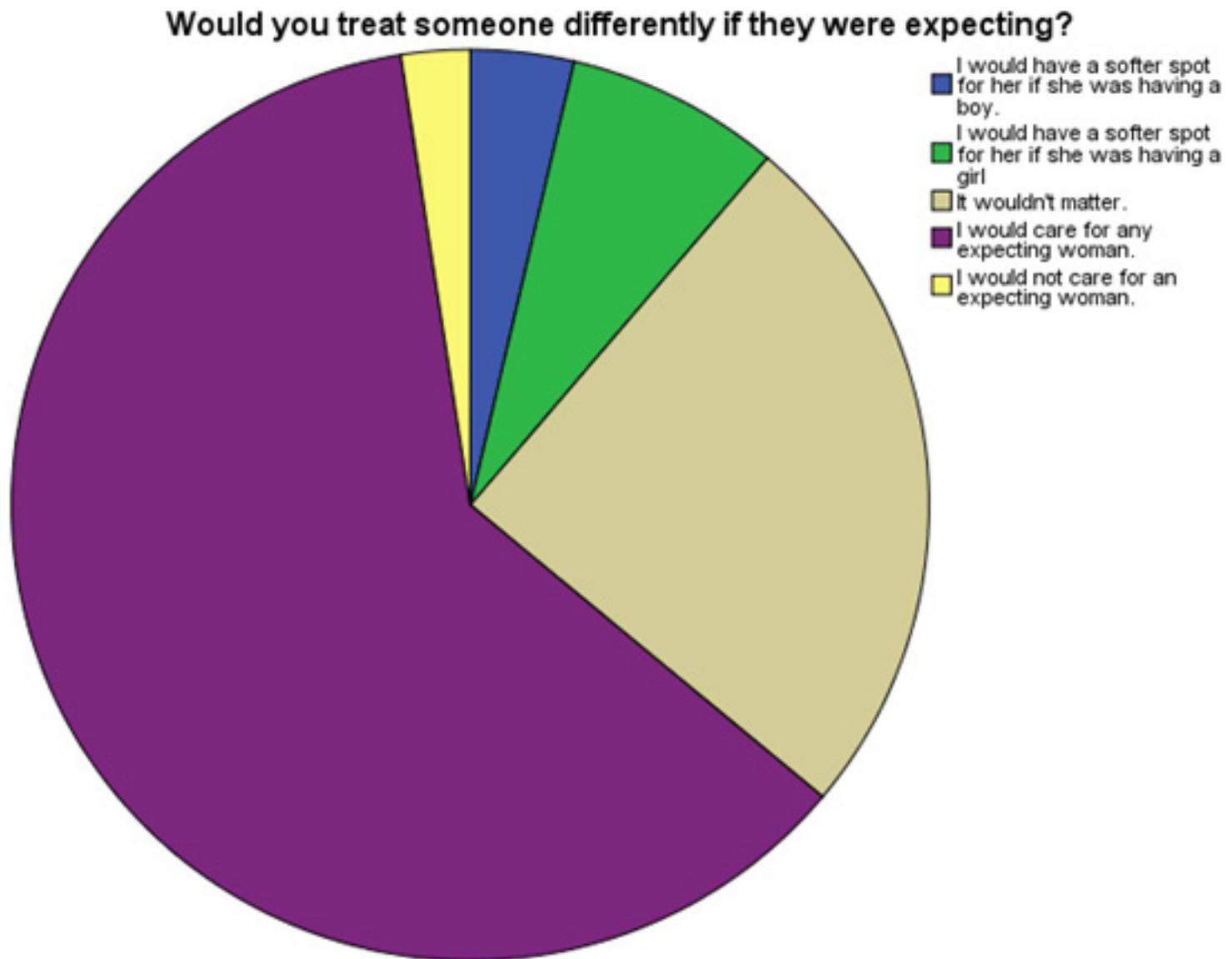


Figure 7 shows that 58% of our targeted audience has misconceptions about basic human genetics.

Figure 7

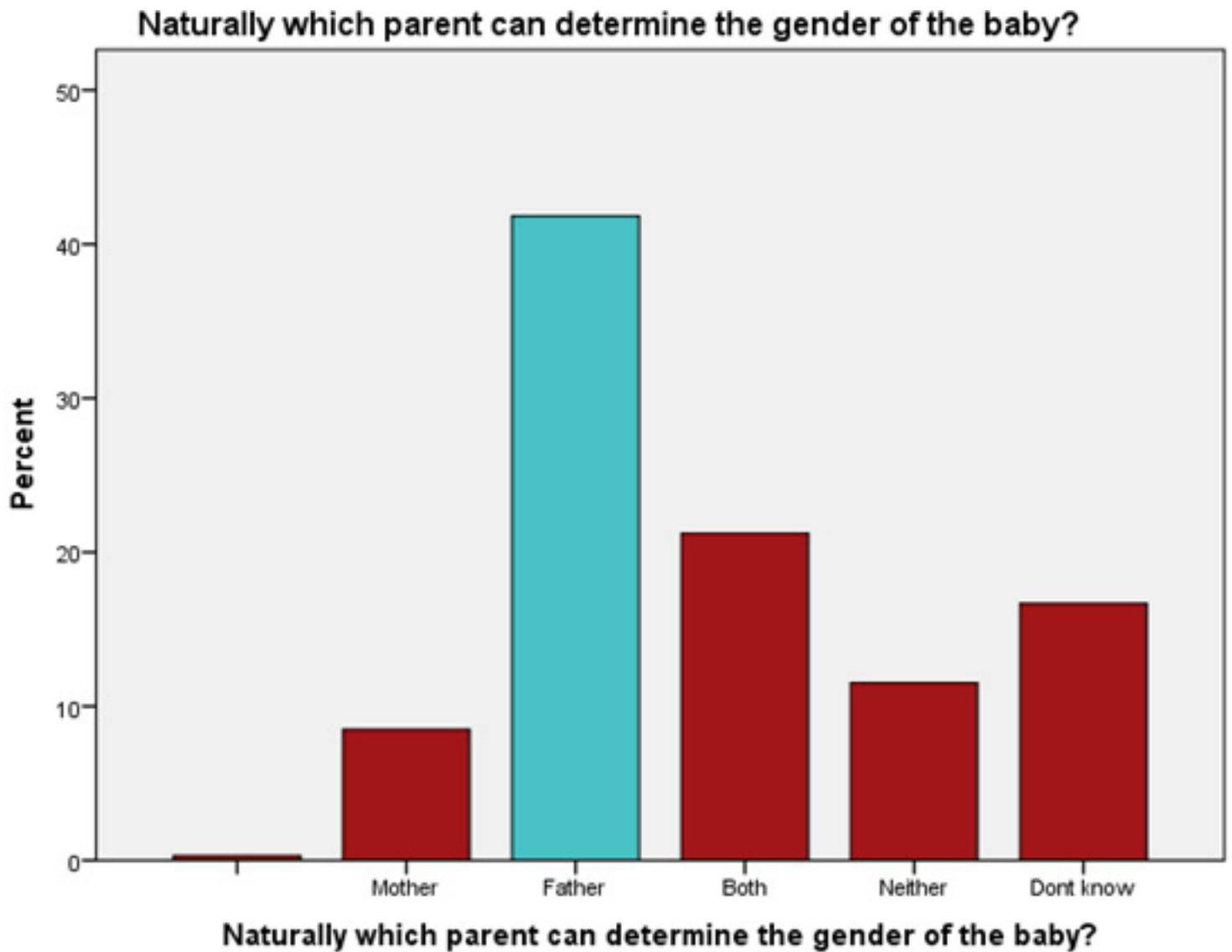


Figure 8 shows more than 4% of our participants still think a man should re-marry in hopes of having a son, if he is only having daughters from his first wife.

Figure 8

Do you think a man should re-marry a second or third time if he is having only daughters from his first marriage?

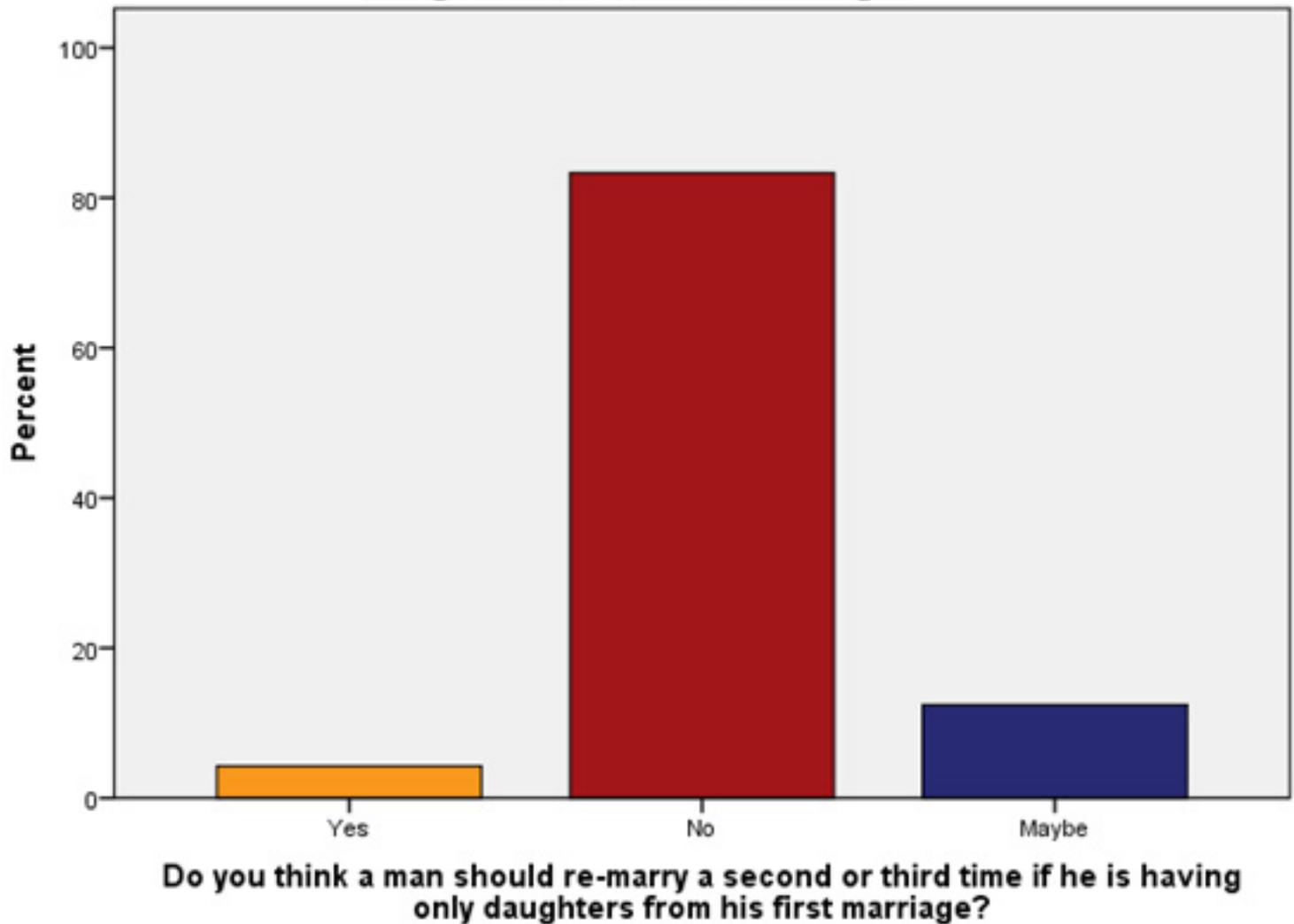
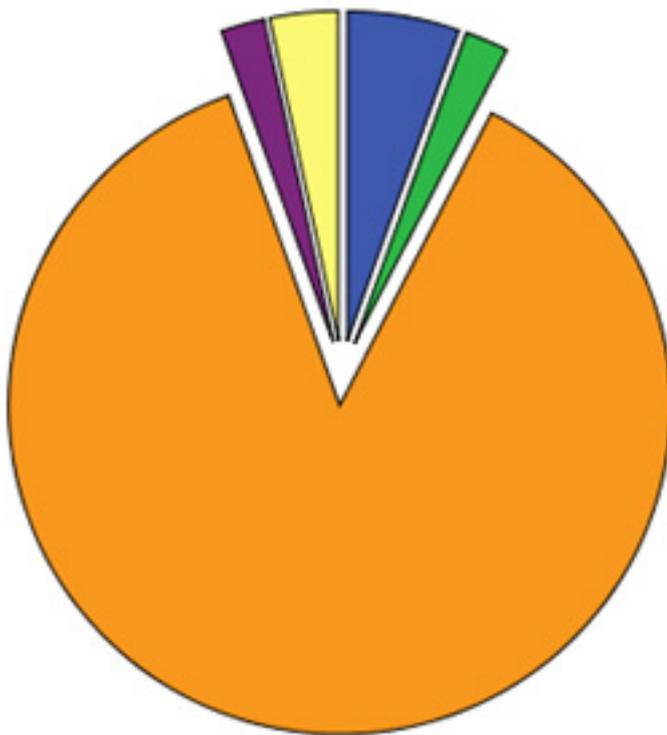


Figure 9 shows that when asked about their ideal family, 5.5% said only 1 child (daughter), 2.1% said only 1 child (son), 87% said both sons and daughters, 2.1% said only sons and 3.3% said they would ideally want only daughters.

Figure 9

What do you think would be an ideal family?

- Only 1 child (daughter)
- Only 1 child (son)
- Both sons and daughters
- Only sons
- Only daughters



Discussion

According to our study, more than 4% of our participants still think a man should re-marry in hopes of having a son, if he is only having daughters from his first wife.

Similar results were found in 2004, when an article published in The National Bureau of Economic Research stated that, “ We document that parents with girls are significantly more likely to be divorced, that divorced fathers are more likely to have custody of their sons,” [11] Another study conducted in Punjab, Pakistan in 2013 also shows disheartening results where a couple is simply stated infertile if they fail to bare sons, and the idea of men remarrying in hopes of children is deeply embedded in the Indo-Pak culture. The study states, “Infertility, which is perceived as no children, or not having the right number and type of children (sons), therefore weakens the woman’s marital ties with her husband. The consequences of the weakening of the marital bonds can be catastrophic for women. This includes emotional and physical abuse, threat of remarriage,” [12].

According to our study, 61.5% of the candidates said they would care for any expecting woman, 3.6% said

they would have a softer spot for her if she were having a boy while 7.6% said they would care more for her if she was expecting a girl whereas for 24.8% the gender of the foetus did not matter.

These results contradicted greatly those of a study conducted in 2011 in Jordan which states “The prevalence of violence (of any type) during pregnancy was 40.9%. Physical violence was the highest (34.7 %), followed by psychological violence (28.1%) and sexual violence (15.5%). Women who had four or more female children (OR 4.03, 95% CI 1.3- 11.9) and were under pressure to have a male child (OR 1.82, 95% CI 1.07- 3.08) were more likely to be exposed to violence during pregnancy” [13].

According to our study, only 3.3% of our candidates consider an ideal family consisting of just daughters, and only 5.5% were content with just 1 child and that too being a daughter whereas 87% considered an ideal family to consist of both sons and daughters, regardless of the number of children. These results coincided with the results of a few more articles published worldwide. An article published in 2004 in The National Bureau of Economic Research stated that, “families with at least two children, the probability of having another child is higher

for all-girl families than all-boy families. This preference for sons seems to be largely driven by fathers, with men reporting they would rather have a boy by more than a two to one margin" [11] .

It is sad that the same results were found in an empirical study in Korea in 1983 where "The observed frequency of all-girl families is especially small in comparison with the expected value" [14] which just goes to show that in the past three and a half decades, while on one hand the world has developed in every field, our mentalities have stayed perfectly preserved.

Another study conducted in 1990 in Pakistan found results very similar to the ones we found in our study in 2019 which state that, "all workers with an ideal of 1 child wanted a son. 90% of those wanting an ideal of 2 children desired 1 son and 1 daughter 95% with an ideal of 3 children wanted 2 sons and 1 daughter" [15] .

Conclusion

This study concludes that even in today's time and age, university students from reputable Institutes of Pakistan feel that married women of our society are only respected if they have sons. 70-80% of our audience felt that women bearing just daughters are not respected in their homes. They face prejudice since pregnancy which continues till later in life where they are not taken into consideration during decision making as opposed to other women from the same household that are bearing sons; a critical argument, in a society where the joint family system prevails and nuclear families are looked down upon.

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