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**CHALLENGES FACED BY GIRLS IN THE COURSE OF THEIR SECONDARY
SCHOOL EDUCATION**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges faced by girls in the course of their secondary school education.

Methodology: This study utilized the exploratory research design. The study targeted specific girls within the secondary schools and those who dropped out of school aged between 14-24 years in the last four years. The sample was drawn from form two, form three and forms four secondary students. Data was generated from both secondary and primary sources. Purposive sampling was applied to get the division and the district in which units of observation have the required characteristics. The three schools in Chuluni division purposively selected were Kaluva Mixed day and boarding secondary school, Mbitini mixed day secondary school and Mbitini girls' secondary school. Snowball sampling was used to reach girls out of school. The study targeted specific girls within the secondary schools and those who dropped out of school aged between 14-24 years in the last four years. It also targeted, teachers, parents and education officer in the secondary schools in Chuluni Division. The tool for data collection was a set of semi-structured questionnaires specifically designed for the students in and out of school. A key approach adopted by the study was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) supplemented by in-depth interviews and also the study made use of direct observations that were guided by observation guide or checklist. Furthermore, inferential and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. Data were coded and entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 23.

Results: The girls out of school indicated that they had dropped out of school due to financial constraints. Additionally, due to poverty parents fail to support the girl child through secondary school education in preparation for higher education. This makes this group of young girls face the risk of early sexual exposure, early marriage and sexual abuse.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: The study findings validates the Theory of liberal feminist that all sexes should be treated with equality. The government should embark on ensuring that policies do not discriminate against girls and women - in education, in employment or in gaining access to leadership positions. Measures should be put in place to create a balance in favor of girls - by offering scholarships or school feeding programmers, through making schools girl-friendly with proper and separate sanitation, by employing more women teachers for the security of girls and as role models.

Keywords: *Challenges, girls, secondary school, education*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is perceived as the cornerstone of economic growth and social development, as well as a principal means of improving the welfare of individuals (Orodho, 2014). It is also a key social service through which people identify the scope for spending and greater efficiency in meeting the needs of the poor children and their families. Subsequently, educating the youth plays an equally important role in the economic and social development of poor countries (MDG, 2005:55).

The World Bank is committed to fighting poverty and helping developing countries invest in their education systems. In light of this, it has embraced the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as its main priority and particularly "eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education". The World Bank has recognized that there is no investment more effective for achieving development goals than educating girls.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), every child has a right to education and the States' duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory. Further, it encourages accessibility to different forms of secondary education to every child and makes higher education available to all on the basis of capacity. Education is a powerful tool for accelerating development. It is however pathetic that 140 million children in the world still do not attend schools, two-thirds of them being girls (Howley, et al 2009).

Educating girls has been repeatedly shown to increase their self-esteem and influence over their own lives as well as family and community decisions. To add on, it helps in decreasing environmental degradation, lowers fertility, improves maternal and child health. Unfortunately, considerable resistance still exists in developing countries in educating girls (Joshi, 2005).

In Africa, out of the 44 million girls out of school, at least 20 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa (DFID, 2004). The total number of children out of school in SSA has gone down but only 89 girls to every 100 boys are enrolled in school (Ibid). According to UNESCO (2019), most African governments spent less than 20 per cent of their budgets on secondary education; "Households are spending the highest proportion of their incomes on secondary education, compared to primary and university level education". Retention and completion rates of girls in the secondary level continue to be affected especially in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (USAID, 2005). Due to the limited secondary school opportunities, boys outnumber girls.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Analytical Report (Vol.8), on education indicated, proves with lower progression rates are Eastern Province (37%), Coast (40%), North Eastern (41%) and Rift Valley (42%) as compared to Nairobi (68%). Males had a higher progression rate (51%) than females (49%). The Traditional rural-urban pattern indicated a higher progression rate (60%) than rural areas 40%. District levels analysis of schools indicated Kitui and Mwingi recorded the lowest rates of 29.4% and 29.2%.

Education is the responsibility of governments, and when governments fail to invest in education, the system fails and quality education suffers (DFID, 2004). Numerous school levies make

accessibility to education unaffordable e to most parents. This has impacted negatively on the girls, leading to low participation in education and high illiteracy levels. This is particularly the case in Kitui District whereby dropout rates at the secondary level is 16.3% for boys while for girls is 21.3%. There are 66 secondary schools with a total enrolment rate of 11.8%, and the boys' average years of school attendance is 3.8% while that of girls is 3.5% (KDDP, 2002-2008:12). This implies that girls are not getting equitable access to education as compared to boys in Kitui district.

According to PRSP (2001-2004: 19), low-income households find it increasingly difficult to keep girls in school. Consequently, the girls are asked to drop out of school in favour of their brothers in order to enable the latter to continue with education. Many rural parents prefer to educate boys arguing that girls will eventually marry and therefore need to be prepared for that marriage role. Some parents have been under the impression that it's the government's elusive responsibility to provide all the necessary resources to support the education -sub-sector. In Kitui District, girls have not been fully participating in high school education and there are serious gender imbalances as aforementioned.

Despite the fact that educated girls have better opportunities to earn higher wages, participate in community life and decision making and are better informed about health risks that may be relevant to both themselves and their families such as HIV and AIDS (DFID, 2006). HIV-AIDS has also contributed significantly to girls' dropout rates as they are left orphaned and as family heads, hence impacting negatively on the girls' education. The girls also bear the responsibility of fending for their siblings.

There have been previous government education policies, like EFA, allocation of bursaries and even NGOs supporting education programs, yet attaining secondary level education is still a challenge to many girls and dropout rates among girls is still higher than for boys (GoK, 1997:12). In many cases, gender disparities in the education sector are still abound in primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Kenya hence, participation and retention of girls in education and career opportunities is hindered. According to UNESCO (2004), the challenges of implementing Education policies indicate that there is passive participation of parents and communities in the education sector.

Research specifically on the gender factor in girls' education and their participation in high school education in Kenya is scanty. Therefore, there is a need to undertake the study to provide more information on the gender factor in girls' education, and participation of girls in high school education in Kenya.

The study was conducted in Kitui District because IG>w levels of gender equity awareness and high poverty levels characterize the area. It is also an ASAL region with erratic rainfall, which cannot support meaningful farming practices to supplement family incomes. This further impedes girls' participation in education due to limited family incomes. It is in the light of the above-mentioned background that this work sought to carry research on to identify the challenges faced by girls in the course of their secondary school Education in Chuluni Division in Kitui District.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To identify the challenges faced by girls in the course of their secondary school Education

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Liberal feminist theory

From a liberal feminist perspective, the main gender problem is that prejudice, values, and norms deny women equal access to the opportunities, resources and rewards that the society offers. Forcing children to choose between child care and employment; excluding women from positions of authority in economic, political, religious, and other organizations; segregating women in jobs market, devaluing, objectifying, and portraying women as inferior in a wide variety of cultural stereotypes; and socializing women and men in ways which enhances male privileges and female subordination are all identified as central to gender equality (Samkage,2015).

Liberal feminists advocate for equality for all sexes (Lyon, 1983). Equality of opportunity and freedom of choice are seen as the bedrock of individual wellbeing, which in turn makes possible an enlightened society and progressive social change. Therefore, the gender factor in girls' participation in high school education should be addressed so as to enable them complete school to the highest level possible.

Liberal feminism theory focuses mainly in giving equal opportunities to women (girls included) especially in accessing resources such as property, wealth, education and employment. They further recommend removal of the barriers to women and encourage girls' freedom of choice and equal participation. All forms of discriminatory behaviors and prejudices should be eliminated and all people considered equal in terms of education (Rosser, 2015).

2.2 Empirical review

Access to good quality education is acknowledged as a basic human right. Nevertheless, while enrolment rates have increased globally over three decades, in the developing world today: more than 130 million 6-11 year olds are out of school. Some 81 million (60 percent) of them are girls! More than 273 million 12-17 year olds are out of school, 148 million (54 percent) of whom are girls! This is the age of secondary education. Out of the 100 million children who dropouts of school before completing four years are girls.

As a result of the 1995 Beijing platform for Action. One of the critical areas of concern was the Girl Child Education. This was due to the fact that Gender discrimination has been so entrenched in social norms as to escape notice. It has kept young girls from school; pushed them to the peripheries of early marriages and when they finally become women, they are kept out of decision making for their families and communities. Some of the main obstacles identified as facing girl's education include; social cultural and religious practices, availability of water hygiene and sanitation, financing education, pregnancy, relevance of education programmers, distance from school and lack of security.

The African Girls Education Initiative (AGEI) has been focusing on children in ASAL districts especially in Northern Kenya. Girls in these regions face numerous challenges, which act as a barrier towards school completion. According to UNICEF (2006) these barriers include cultural attitudes, sexual violence, quality issues, poverty and drought. In relation to cultural attitudes, traditional preference for sons diminishes the value of girls' education. Early marriages and pregnancy as early as age ten prevent girls from enrolling in school or completing basic education.

In Zambia, it was found that teachers valued and encouraged boys' participation in class more than they valued girls' and allocated the school tasks along strict gender lines, leaving girls to sweep the floors or clean the toilets (UNICEF, 2004).

According to EYC (2003) the ASAL areas enrolment of girls still lags behind. National aggregated figures indicate the wide disparity between regions in relation to accessibility of education. For example, girls within the ASAL regions comprise less than 37 percent of primary school enrolment, yet in Nairobi and central provinces, primary schools girls are fully represented.

Sexual violence acts as a barrier in that girls are kept out of school for initiation rites and female genital mutilation is also still practiced in some areas. Sexual harassment both in and out of school is widespread and also leads to non-attendance and dropout. Poverty drives young girls who fail to complete school into prostitution, hence predisposing them to the risks of HIV/AIDS. One of the greatest challenges impacting negatively on the achievements in education sector in many countries has been the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is sad to note that the majority of HIV infected people are between 15-39 years of age, the most productive people (GoK). This again falls in the age bracket of secondary school education.

Quality issues like gender insensitive classroom dynamics and gender stereotyping in textbooks and supplementary materials work against girls. School facilities are inadequate, even so with increased enrolment. Poverty causes early marriages to girl and that enhancing physical environment evidences shows that the availability of safe water and separate latrines is a major factor in getting children especially girls to enter and complete school (ibid). Poverty and drought act also as a barrier and parents struggle to support their children's education due to household poverty particularly in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands and repeated drought. This is the case in Kitui District in which poverty and drought are persistent hence hindering school completion (Kitui District Development Plan, 2002-2008).

Attendance rates are affected by health and nutrition factors, including the impact of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, as well as ability to pay school levies. Poor attendance leads to increased repetition and drop out. The declining economic situation in the country and the frequent droughts has also taken their toll on attendance. The current drought has seen declining attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools. Preliminary data for 2000 suggest that the gender gap is starting to widen again at the primary and secondary levels in the drought affected areas, as parents choose to invest their depleted resources into the education of boys. Gender disparities are also reinforced by the lack of adequate water and classroom space. Sanitation affects girls' enrolment more than of boys (World Summit for Children, 2000: 15).

In terms of pupil performance, the tendency to stereotype subjects according to gender, auditing of textbooks, etc. affect girls' education. However, girls still suffer some bias in terms of teacher attention compared to boys. Girls lack female role models in the district due to inadequate number

of female teachers in the area. Boys are also given preference by parents when it comes to purchasing core textbooks.

GoK (2002:2) conducted household survey data to explore the socio-economic determinants of enrolment and it revealed that the two strongest determinants of both primary and secondary school enrolments are the economic background of a child and mothers schooling. The empirical results also indicate that the care of younger siblings is a chore that keeps girls from attending primary and secondary school. Both primary and secondary enrolments of girls (but not for boys) are adversely affected by the presence of children under 3 years of age in the household.

The low participation of girls in high school education in Kitui District could be attributed to some negative factors that negatively impact more on the girl than on the boys. For instance, as cited earlier, early marriages and pregnancies, is argued by Chege and Sifuna (2006), Bwonda and Njeru (2005), Gakuru, (1998). Therefore there is need for the government and other stakeholders to speed up support for the girl child education.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the exploratory research design. The study targeted specific girls within the secondary schools and those who dropped out of school aged between 14-24 years in the last four years. It also targeted, teachers, parents and education officer in the secondary schools in Chuluni Division. The sample was drawn from form two, form three and forms four secondary students. Data was generated from both secondary and primary sources. Purposive sampling was applied to get the division and the district in which units of observation have the required characteristics. The three schools in Chuluni division purposively selected were Kaluva Mixed day and boarding secondary school, Mbitini mixed day secondary school and Mbitini girls' secondary school. Snowball sampling was used to reach girls out of school. The study targeted specific girls within the secondary schools and those who dropped out of school aged between 14-24 years in the last four years. It also targeted, teachers, parents and education officer in the secondary schools in Chuluni Division The tool for data collection was a set of semi-structured questionnaires specifically designed for the students in and out of school. A key approach adopted by the study was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) supplemented by in-depth interviews and also the study made use of direct observations that were guided by observation guide or checklist. Furthermore, inferential and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. Data were coded and entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 23

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Challenges Faced in the course of secondary School Education

The researcher anticipated that challenges faced in the course of secondary school education often lead to school dropout. Therefore, both the girls in school and out of school were requested to articulate the challenges that they face or faced in the course of their education.

The following graph represents the challenges girls face in their secondary education as articulated by the girl in school.

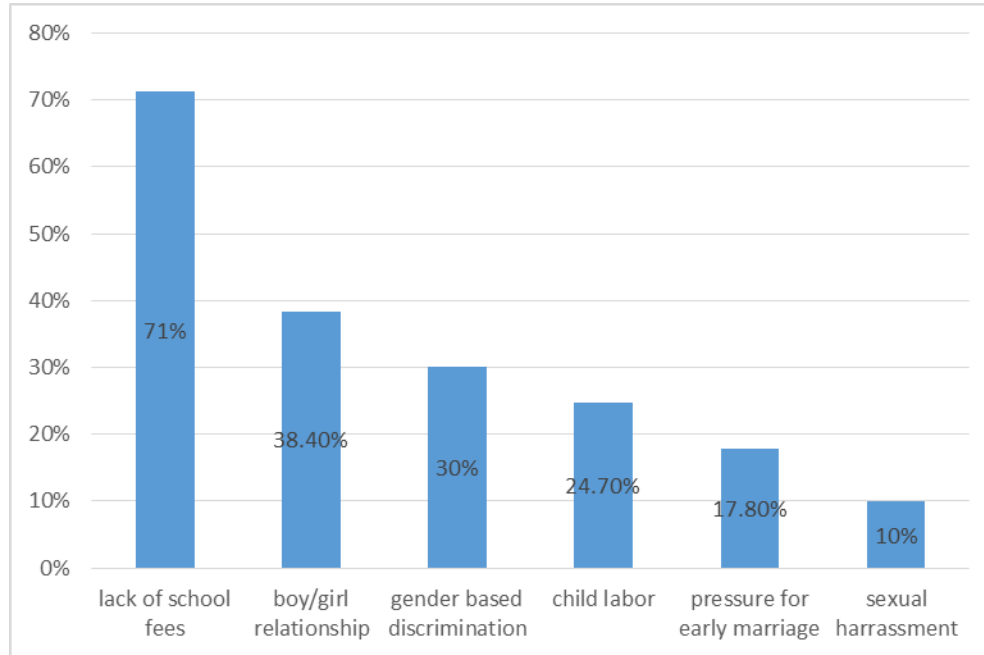


Figure 1: Challenges Faced in the course of secondary School Education

Seventy percent of the girls indicated that lack of school fees affects their secondary school education. It was evident that boy/girl relationships could significantly affect almost 38.4% of girls, whereas 30% of girls were challenged by gender based discrimination. Further, 24.7% cited child labor being a threat to their secondary education, about 17.8% could be affected by pressure for early marriage while 10% cited sexual harassment. Other challenges include poor performance and premarital pregnancy. The greatest challenge faced by all respondents was lack of school fees as highlighted by 71.2%. This is in line with findings by Chege and Sifuna (2006).

4.2 Challenges Faced By Girls Who Dropped Out Of School.

The greatest challenge faced by all respondents was lack of school fees as cited by 60 % of the respondents out of school. This was followed by early marriage 28 % and lastly distance made 12% girls drop out of school.

Table 1: Challenges Faced By Girls Who Dropped Out Of School.

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of school Fees	15	60
Early Marriage	7	28
Distance	3	12
Total	25	100

4.3 Assistance in payment of school fees

When requested to indicate if the school going girls had received some form of financial assistance towards payment of school fees, 29% said they had been awarded bursaries from ministry of education, 11% had received aid from CDF Bursary kitty, 15% had partial sponsorship and 13% was fully sponsored. This implies that many girls did get much financial support from sponsors. This agrees with the findings by Bwonda and Njeru (2005) that financial support influences the academic progress of the girl child.

On the same note, 38.5% of the girls out of school had never received any form of financial assistance. However, an equal number, 15% had received partial sponsorship, while 7.7% were awarded bursary from the Ministry of Education. Therefore, it was found that lack of financial assistance, especially to students from poor backgrounds increases their chances of dropping out of school and that the highest number, 32% had never received bursary form the Ministry of Education. Many parents are unable to meet the cost of education and a number of girls end up dropping out of school. These calls for other stakeholders in education to come up with means of funding girls' education to enable them participate fully in education. The table below illustrates the responses.

Table 2: Assistance in payment of school fees

Type of assistance	Frequency	Percentage
Bursary fees from ministry of education	22	29
CDF bursary aid	8	11
Full school fee sponsorship	10	13
Partial sponsorship	11	15
None	24	32
Total	75	100

4.4 Payment of the school fees

Concerning financial support in high school education, 68 % of the girls in school have their fees paid by their father while 17.2% rely on their mother and a minimal 12% relies on a guardian. Similarly, majority of dropouts i .e. 2.8 % used to have their fees paid by their fathers while 23.1% had been sponsored by their mothers. Figure 2 illustrates this.

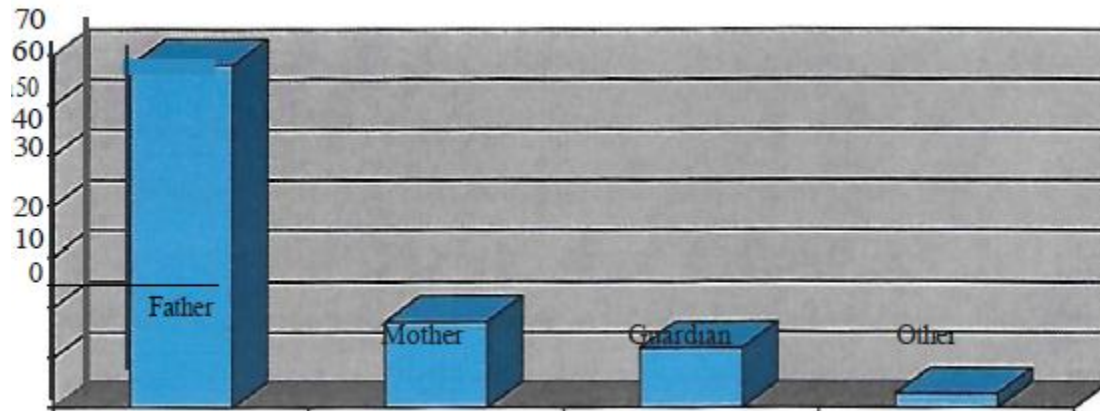


Figure 2: Payment of school fees for girls who dropped out

Although girls dropped out of school, the largest number indicated that their fee was being paid by their fathers. In deed 72% of the respondents were assisted by their fathers to pay school fees while 28 % had their fees paid by their mothers. Though these fees payment was not fully met and therefore the girls ended up dropping out due to financial constraints among other constraints previous highlighted.

4.5 Challenges facing other girls apart from the respondents themselves

Some of the challenges affecting students in school include lack of fees reported by 37.3%, boy/girl relationships reported by 20.6%; child labor reported by 14.3%; and gender based discrimination reported by 11.1% respondents. Other notable challenges include pressure for early marriage (10.3%), sexual harassment and other factors constituting 6.4% such as household chores.

While highlighting other challenges other than school fees that affect the girls, it should be noted that 54.8% of the girls in school indicated that provision of basic school necessities (e.g. shopping and pocket money) posed a significant challenge when not met. Also 8.2% highlighted guidance and counseling in relation to home related problems whereas an equal percentage felt that Jack of enough boarding facilities affects their high school life. 9.6% school going girls were threatened by lack of equal treatment with boys. In addition, 8.2% felt that inadequate parental love could affect their secondary school education whereas; 4.1% needed a good student/teacher relationship.

A girl respondent in a focus group discussion said;

"We trek from very long distances. In fact night preps are not compulsory for girls since it is insecure at night. I prefer staying at home instead of attending them and endanger my life.

4.6 Other factors affecting girls' education

The researcher purposed to establish whether the respondent s felt that their fellow school mates faced similar factors that affect them as secondary school girls. It was evident that more than half of the girls lacked basic provisions. On average, almost one in every ten girls was affected by lack

of adequate guidance and counseling, and an almost equal number lack security. About 8% were affected by lack of proper medical care an equal number received poor treatment from teachers whereas 6.8% were exposed to peer pressure and bad influence. Similar sentiments were articulated by girls out of school, the dropouts. In this category, none of the school they attended provided sanitary towels. Over 54% had no adequate water and toilets. Almost 4 girls in every 5 cited that security in the school was not adequate.

Notably, lack of security, emerged as a pertinent issue both to the girls in and out of school. The sampled schools are day schools within a radius of 2 to 4 kilometers from the home to school.

However, it can be understood that girls fear for their security, irrespective of this short distance.

The respondents were individually highly affected by lack of basic needs as reported by 29 respondent s and concerned over lack of guidance and security as reported by 15 of the respondents. The students were equally concerned over lack of preparation time and learning materials. Another girl respondent in mixed school had the following to say;

"We have been forced to leave preps for boys only hence, we lack adequate time for revision as compared to the boys in our class and sometimes we lack enough writing materials since our parents have to meet all the expenses.

One of the former principal and currently an education officer said,

"Gender wants to take advantage of us. Girls are victimized while boys are left to continue with school especially when they become pregnant. Parents favor boys and even when parents don't have enough; it's the girls who fall out of the favor. Distance to schools is also challenge especially for girls who are day scholars; boys keep on wooing them until they give in."

It was observed that there was close identity between the factors that affect the respondents and what they perceive to be affecting other girls in the learning environment.

4.7 Home demands affecting girls in school in the course of their studies

There are various home tasks and domestic activities which affect school attendance by girls. The most outstanding activities that affect school attendance are cooking, childcare and water fetching. Nearly 55% of the respondents are involved in these activities.

Another set of activities which interrupt girls schooling are firewood fetching, cultivation of food crops and marketing of agricultural produce. Over 30% of the respondents are involved in these other activities. However cookery was cited as the greatest demand and boys get involved in this due to cultural factors. This is in line with findings by Gakuru, (1998).

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary of Findings

Majority of the girls in school cited Jack of school fees as their greatest challenge (71.2%) to achieving their education moreover 60% of the drop outs cited same challenges therefore; this implies that lack of fees made girls not participate fully as compared to their brothers. Concerning whether any form of assistance had been given to them, less than 40% of both girls and out of

school had ever received sponsorship from the MOEST, CDF bursary Aid. The highest number had received nothing for sponsorship despite in regions being on ASAL.

5.2 Conclusion

It can be deduced that majority of the respondents highlighted that lack of school fees affects their course of study. Moreover, the girls out of school indicated that they had dropped out of school due to financial constraints. Additionally, due to poverty parents fail to support the girl child through secondary school education in preparation for higher education. This makes this group of young girls face the risk of an early sexual exposure, early marriage and sexual abuse. It is necessary to award scholarships to girls in school and match them up with mentors/role models.

5.3 Recommendation

The study findings validates the Theory of liberal feminist that all sexes should be treated with equality. The government should embark on ensuring that policies do not discriminate against girls and women - in education, in employment or in gaining access to leadership positions. Measures should be put in place to create a balance in favor of girls - by offering scholarships or school feeding programmers, through making schools girl-friendly with proper and separate sanitation, by employing more women teachers for the security of girls and as role models.

The government can start a parallel adolescent education program for girls who dropped out of school or who never went to school. Dropping out of school makes it very difficult to obtain and attain basic education. There is a need for targeted initiatives to give these girls, most often in their adolescent years, the chance they missed.

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