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## **THE SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF ORPHANED GIRLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MERU SOUTH SUB-COUNTY KENYA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Orphan hood is a condition in which a child has lost one or both parents and is left to fend for his or her life. Despite the government's efforts, orphan hood has encroached making orphaned girls not to fully enjoy the free education. Losing a parent during childhood is a crisis that if not handled well may make the child decline academically or drop out of school entirely. Data from Meru South Sub-county education office shows that academic performance of orphaned girls' is low. If the issue of orphaned girl's education is not addressed, the country may not achieve its objectives on education for all. There is need to study the factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls in Meru South Sub-county. The purpose of this study was to assess factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls in public primary schools in Meru South Sub-county. The study looked at social factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls. Descriptive survey research design was used. The target population was 600 orphaned girls in 150 public primary schools from which a sample size of 234 orphaned girls in class 6 and 7 was purposively selected for the study. In addition, 20 teachers who teach standard 6 and 7 were included in the sample. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and orphaned girls in the sample population. Socialists and other experts from the Faculty of Education and Resources Development at Chuka University checked the instruments to ensure validity. The computer based statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 was used to analyze the data. Data was presented by use of frequency distribution tables, bar charts and pie charts. The study found out that academic performance of orphaned girls was affected by*

*social factors. The findings provide information to guide the government and ministry of Education in coming up with policies and mechanisms to address factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls. It will also help head teachers and teachers to come up with policies and get workable solutions to factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls.*

**Keywords:** orphaned Girls, Social Factors, Academic Performance, Factors Affecting Orphaned Girls, performance of orphaned Girls.

## **1.1 Introduction**

Girls' education saves and improves the lives of girls and women the society (UNICEF, 2004). Studies have shown that education has a measurable impact on multiple roles of women in national development and household welfare, thus, education for women has a positive impact on succeeding generations' academic achievement (Deem, 2020). However, Orphan hood encroaches on and impedes the educational progress of girls. Orphanhood is a condition where a child has either one or both parents dead (Beegle, 2006). According to USAID (2004) orphans can be classified as either partial; where the child has lost one parent, or total orphans where the child has lost both parents.

According to Barneet and Whiteside (2002), the major cause of orphanhood Sub-Saharan African countries is HIV/AIDS and other ailments like Malaria, cancer and other terminal diseases. However, deaths also have been as result of accidents, terrorism, tribal and inter clan clashes among others. The burden of raising orphans in most cases falls primarily on close relatives like grandparents, uncles, aunts and also friends (USAID 2004). Death of parents introduces orphans to changes that they are not prepared for (Bicego et al, 2003). The changes may involve moving from a middle-upper-class urban home to a poor rural relatives' home (Swaran & Shikha, 2013). It may also involve separation from siblings, which is often done arbitrarily when orphaned children are divided among relatives without due considerations of their needs (Swaran & Shikha, 2013). The children who do not move are forced to live alone and take care of their young siblings in their late parents' homes without the presence of an elderly person (Guest, 2001). These changes might be very stressful as they pose new challenges and constraints to the orphan's life. Orphaned girls may not endure such conditions and this may affect their academic performance (Tanga, 2013).

According to World Bank (2003), out of one hundred and twenty-one million children worldwide who are not in school, majority of them are orphaned girls. Girls are quite vulnerable when not in school as they are likely to suffer from abuses and are victims of domestic violence at homes. The UN has stressed protection of the vulnerable and orphaned children because uneducated girls are at risk of becoming marginalized. They are also more vulnerable to exploitation, and the spread of HIV/AIDS is said to be faster among such girls as compared to boys (USAID, 2004). In case of mothers' deaths, girls take up roles of taking care of their siblings. In the lower zone of Meru South sub-county, schools are far apart and children are

forced to travel long distances to and from the schools such that they arrive at school/home hungry and tired (UNICEF, 2001). Orphaned girls therefore have no opportunity to do their school assignments, especially orphaned girls who have to bear with domestic chores (Ombuya et al, 2017). Orphaned girls are worst hit by orphan hood because they are more likely to fall prey to early marriages. Moreover, men may take advantage of their situation to introduce them to early sex leading to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year raised from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002 UNICEF (2004).

Kenya is estimated to host more than 300,000 children and youth on the streets who engage in survival tactics that endanger the well-being and that of society. According to the government of Kenya reports many of them have escaped abuse at home. They are often subjected to police brutality, sexual abuse and economic exploitation (Human rights watch (2007). Taking care of siblings as well as sick relatives and the heavy responsibilities of caring for siblings denies orphaned girls time to do private studies (Parsons, 2012). Lally (2013) states that lack of nurture and guidance due to parental loss and inadequate compensatory care may stifle orphans' socialization.

UNICEF (2001) Noted pathetic situations, where grandparents who are expected to be supported by their children suddenly had to care for their orphaned grandchildren. These grandparents are not able to provide discipline and adequate socialization as well as to address the basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and health care. Subbarao & Coury (2004) mentioned that Orphaned girls living with widowed mothers were significantly less depressed than total orphans because mothers care for siblings though the death of the father who was the breadwinner is more often accompanied by abject poverty.

According to Orodho (2004), many of such orphans have subsequently dropped out of school in order to either farm the family land to take care of themselves and their siblings, or in desperation, migrated to large urban centers in search of employment opportunities, or forced into early marriages. Castle (1996) noted that apart from academics and enrolment, other out of class issues edge girls out of school. The out-of-class include sexual abuse and rape. Orphaned girls are subjected to sexual abuse by male teachers and male students due to their vulnerability. This affects their morale to schooling; thus interfering with their concentration and performance. Female teachers also show dislike for girls because of the girls' looks, hairstyles and so on.

UNICEF (2004) identified difficulties girls face in accessing and being retained in schools in rural areas. These difficulties include harassment by boys, long distances to be covered between school and home, early pregnancy, lack of resources and lack of female teachers in secondary schools in the rural areas to act as role models to girls. It is because the facilities for accommodation and security of such teachers are usually absent or inadequate. However, on certain issues such as early pregnancies things have since changed and pregnant girls are allowed

maternity leave and then allowed back to continue with school. Despite this opportunity given to such girls, many of them still drop out of school due to domestic problems and stigma. Beegle (2006) postulates that orphaned children whose parents died of HIV/AIDS are stigmatized and suffer trauma in schools due to lack of confidentiality and privacy in handling them. Perhaps this is possible only in schools where there are no trained teacher-counselors to handle orphaned children, especially the girl-child. It has also been noted that training of such teachers is not regularly held and if done, then it reaches very few teachers at a given time. In most cases, it is only the head teachers who benefit from many such training opportunities. Case and Ableidinger, (2004) postulate that orphanhood impacts negatively on children's school enrolment.

There is a common myth in some African communities which links the cure for HIV/AIDS to sexual intercourse with a virgin girl. Many orphans have fallen victim to men holding onto such appalling myths. Adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa are six times more likely to be infected by HIV/AIDS than boys of the same age (Meure sing, 1995). A study carried out in Matabeleland in Zimbabwe showed that some traditional healers advise their clients who seek luck in farming, business, gambling or other monetary affairs to secure this luck by having sex with very young girls. Orphaned girls would present ready targets to such kind of men. Financial gains are also abused as young girls exchange sex for food, money or clothing. While at school, young girls may be raped by their peers or coerced into having sex with their teachers.

Young girls are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation as they work as vendors and domestic workers. Girls may experience sexual abuse and exploitation from their new caretakers. Girls and women may be forced into sex trade in exchange for shelter and protection further increasing the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Emotional deprivations are other factors predisposing the girl child orphans to sexual abuse and exploitation. Orphaned children who live with non-parent guardians may face violation of property rights, labor exploitation, sexual harassment, abuse and violence. (WHO & UNAIDS, 2003) elaborates that some orphans suffer from beating and other physical mistreatment by their guardians and care takers. Any sexual act performed on a child can be considered as abuse (Ahearn & James, 2003). Similarly, state statutes categorize child abuse as any neglect of a child that places the child at risk, regardless of whether the child is actually injured (Ahearn, 2003).

Poor performance of girls is attributed to pre-marital pregnancies (Fatuma& Daniel, 2006). Most girls sit for their exams when they are pregnant or when they are fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers thus making them have divided attention leading to poor performance. A research carried out indicated that the most overwhelming data in girls' problems in their schooling is the high rate of teachers having love relationships with students (Fatuma& Daniel 2006). Teachers try to have love relations with students, all of whom are male teachers dating female students (Fatuma and Daniel 2006), such behavior disrupts their learning process.

The girls are given high marks in their class assessment tests but when it came to the final exam poor performance is experienced (Fatuma and Daniel, 2006). The motivating factors of this relationship include money, gifts, high marks or 'leakage' of the class exams which discourage pro- active reading and class participation resulting to poor performance (Fatuma& Daniel, 2006). Most orphaned girls experience divided attention as they spend most of their time trying to look their best and worrying about petty things like looking good which greatly affects their academic performance. Long sustained or short repeated absence of orphaned girls from school as they take roles of absent parents impairs their understanding and synthesis of new materials present in the classroom thus affecting their academic performance (Hunt, 2008).

## **1.2 Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design and employed qualitative and quantitative approaches. The descriptive survey design was used because it was not possible to manipulate subjects. Orodho (2003) defines research design as a scheme outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research problems. It constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Kothari & Nagrath 2003). The aim of the study was to investigate the factors affecting the academic performance of orphaned girls in public primary schools in Meru South Sub-County. The results obtained would guide the policymakers in government and the stakeholders in education.

## **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The benefits of girls' education to society are immense and cannot be ignored. Girls' education is vital in achieving the Millennium Development Goals on child mortality, improving maternal health and poverty eradication. Orphanhood may encroach and impede the educational progress of girls in society. Data from the Ministry of Education in Meru South Sub-county shows that academic performance of orphaned girls is low. A society with many uneducated mothers has challenges in child health care such as proper nutrition and immunization. Uneducated women would be faced by unemployment and can only fit in low-paying jobs where they earn very meager income hence the vicious cycle of poverty. If the issue of orphaned girls' education is not addressed, the country may not achieve its objectives on Education for all. Despite orphanhood encroaching and impeding the educational progress of girls in society, no study has been done on social factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls in Meru South Sub-county. There is need therefore to investigate factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls in Meru South Sub-county.

## **1.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample size**

Sampling refers to the process by which the researcher attempts to select a representative group from the population under study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) sampling is a process of selecting few cases in order to provide information that can be used to make judgment about a larger number of the population. The target population of this study was about 600

orphaned girls in public primary schools. The researcher sampled 234 orphaned girls which is a representative sample size for a population of 600 as recommended by Kathuri and Pals (1993). The researcher randomly selected fifty public primary schools from the sub-county. In each of the schools, purposeful sampling was used to identify orphaned girls. The researcher then used simple random sampling to pick five orphaned girls from each sampled schools to represent the sample. Simple random sampling was also used to pick one teacher from each of the sampled schools

## 2.1 results and Discussion

On social factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls, data was collected on perceptions of orphaned girls and teachers. Responses from orphaned girls are as indicated on table 1.

Table 1

Pupils' responses on social factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls

| Areas   | Strongly Agree<br>% | Agree<br>% | Not Sure<br>% | Disagree<br>% | Strongly Disagree<br>% |
|---|---------------------|------------|---------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Being neglected by community negatively affects my academic performance                                 | 34.0                | 32.0       | 15.2          | 8.8           | 10.0                   |
| Performance of parental duties denies me time to socialize with my peers lowers my academic performance | 22.4                | 27.2       | 14.0          | 28.0          | 8.4                    |
| My Absenteeism from school as I take up roles of parents negatively affects my academic performance.    | 40.8                | 18.8       | 7.2           | 17.6          | 15.6                   |
| Heavy responsibility of caring for my siblings negatively affects my academic performance.              | 19.6                | 30.0       | 4.8           | 25.6          | 20.0                   |

|   |             |             |            |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Assisting my siblings with homework denies me time to do and private studies lower my academic performance. | 16.0        | 14.4        | 10.4       | 24.8        | 34.4        |
| Mistreatment by my guardians negatively affects my academic performance.                                    | 26.0        | 24.0        | 7.2        | 22.4        | 20.4        |
| <b>Mean</b>   | <b>26.6</b> | <b>24.4</b> | <b>9.8</b> | <b>21.2</b> | <b>18.6</b> |

Findings on table 6 show that majority (66%) of the pupils agree that being neglected by the community negatively affects academic performance of orphaned girls while 49.6% agreed that performing parental duties denies orphaned girls time to socialize with their peers thus affecting their academic performance.

The study sought from teachers’ the social factors affecting academic performance of orphaned girls and the teachers’ responses are shown on table 7.

Table 7

Teachers’ responses on social factor affecting academic performance of orphaned girls

| Areas   | Strongly Agree % | Agree % | Not Sure % | Disagree % | Strongly Disagree % |
|---|------------------|---------|------------|------------|---------------------|
| Neglecting of orphaned girls by community negatively affects their academic performance                                   | 66.7             | 31.0    | 0.0        | 0.0        | 2.4                 |
| Performance of parental duties denies orphaned girls time to socialize with their peers lowers their academic performance | 52.4             | 40.5    | 2.4        | 2.4        | 2.4                 |
| Absenteeism of orphaned girls from school as they take up roles of parents negatively affects their                       | 73.8             | 23.8    | 0.0        | 0.0        | 2.4                 |

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|  |             |             |            |            |            |
|--|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| academic performance.  |             |             |            |            |            |
| Heavy responsibility of caring for their siblings by orphaned girls negatively affects their academic performance.                 | 47.6        | 40.5        | 7.1        | 4.8        | 0.0        |
| Assisting their siblings with homework by orphaned girls denies them time to do private studies lowers their academic performance. | 52.4        | 35.7        | 7.1        | 2.4        | 2.4        |
| Mistreatment of orphaned girls by their guardians negatively affects their academic performance.                                   | 52.4        | 38.1        | 2.4        | 4.8        | 2.4        |
| <b>Mean</b>  | <b>57.6</b> | <b>34.9</b> | <b>1.9</b> | <b>2.4</b> | <b>2.0</b> |

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According to information in table 7 majority (97.7 %) of the teachers indicated that neglecting orphaned girls by community negatively affects their academic performance while 88.1% agreed that heavy responsibility of caring for their siblings negatively affects their academic performance of orphaned girls.

The overall perceptions of orphaned girls and teachers' respondents showed that 71.7% indicated that social factors negatively affect academic performance of orphaned girls. There was however a big disparity between the teachers and orphaned girls perceptions. The responses from teachers were 92.5% agreed while responses from orphaned girls showed that 51% agreed that social factors negatively affect their academic performance.

The study established that neglecting orphaned girls by the community negatively affects academic performance of the orphaned girls. This concurred with Tsegaye et al (2002) who found that the advent of urbanization, spread of HIV/AIDS, recurrent drought, high population, shortage of land and other resources to meet increasing demand of orphans has left thousands of children unaccompanied as neither family or community are able to discharge their traditional roles and functions hence negatively affecting academic performance.

The study established that orphaned girls did not perceive assisting the siblings with homework denied them time to do private studies and did not negatively affect their academic performance.

This is because as they assisted their siblings they were also doing their studies, this differed with Wayoyi (2009) who found that heavy responsibility of caring for siblings and assisting them with homework denies orphaned girls time to do private studies which negatively affected their academic performance.

The study found that mistreatment of orphaned girls by guardians negatively affected their academic performance. This concurred with USAIDS (2003) assertion that that orphans living with non-parents suffer labor exploitation, sexual abuse and other physical mistreatments by their guardians and caretakers which consequently affected their academic performance. The study found that absenteeism of orphaned girls from school as they take up roles of parents negatively affects their academic performance. This concurred with Ombuya et al (2002) who found that both long and short repeated absenteeism from school impairs pupils' ability to understand and synthesize new material presented in the classroom hence negatively affecting academic performance.

## **2.2 Summary of the findings**

The study found that social factors such as performing parental duties denied orphaned girls time to socialize with their peers thus negatively affecting their academic performance. It also established that orphaned girls took heavy responsibility of caring for their siblings with homework which denied them time for their private studies affecting their academic performance. Neglecting of orphaned girls by Community and mistreatment of orphaned girls by guardians were also established as social factors that negatively affects academic performance of orphaned girls.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

According to the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that; Social factors such as neglecting orphaned girls, absenteeism from school as orphaned girls take up roles of parents, heavy responsibility of caring for their siblings and mistreatment by guardians negatively affects academic performance of orphaned girls

## **2.4 Recommendations**

The study found that social factors adversely affected orphaned girls' academic performance. There is, therefore, need for religious organizations, community workers and children welfare offices to sensitize the community on the importance of appreciating orphaned girls, give them the necessary support and help them cope with the loss of parents. This would help them settle and work on improving their academic performance.

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