

Causal Factors Influencing Girl Child School Drop Out: A Case Study of Masvingo District Secondary Schools

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Abstract

School drop out among girls is a global phenomenon. Girl child dropout is a serious problem that affects national development. This study sorts to investigate factors that affect girl children's school dropout in Masvingo district. Failure to finish school undermines girls' development resulting in them having a misty future. The study employed the qualitative case study strategy to probe deeply into factors that contribute to girl child school dropout. The participants were purposively selected in order to allow them to provide the information needed to understand the cases of girl child dropout. The study employed questionnaires and interviews to solicit data. The study has revealed that there are a number of factors associated with this phenomenon. Secondary school comes at a particularly vulnerable age for girls as they enter into puberty. The main challenges the study found include poverty, cultural preference in educating boys, teen pregnancy and early marriages.

Keywords: drop out, dropping out, adolescent, enrolment, child

Introduction and background

The increases in girl child dropouts in the education system are alarming and disturbing. Brown (2004:11) views a dropout as a student who exits the education system before completing the programme for which he/she was registered. Recent studies have found that there are significance differences in enrolment in secondary education between boys and girls. The gender gap has widened in recent years (Amjad, 2007).

Commitments to girls' education have been made in a number of international and regional agreements and frameworks, ratified by majority of African counties including Zimbabwe. The right to education is entrenched in international human rights treaties such as the United Nations on the Rights of the Child –Article 28 (Bridgeland, Dulilo and Morrison 2006 & Zombwe, Vira and Jeremia, 2010). Many African states have introduced national policies to enact their commitments to girls' education under these international and regional frameworks. Some of these include the African Charter on Human and People's Rights 1986, The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1999, ADEA Conference of African Ministries for Education, international development agencies, researchers and education experts (2008). Despite the existence of such policies public awareness of government policies and initiatives of government policies and initiatives, girls education remains very low. Girl child school dropout remains high (Bridgeland et al, 2006).

Obtaining an education is as important for girls as it is for boys. Zombwe et al (2010) assert that women are part of society and their contributions to the development of a nation are significant. Nelson Mandela stressed the importance of education saying:

...education is a great engine of personal development. It is only through education, a daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that the child of a farm worker can become the President of a great nation (Mandela2000:559).

Thus, every human being has a right to education. Education is an opportunity for girls to acquire knowledge and skills for personal development and for influencing the future socio cultural fabric of the country (Amjad, 2007).

In most countries girls are still less likely to enroll and remain in school as evidenced in many studies. Chigwedere 1998 cited in (Stewart, 2004) acknowledges that fewer girls survive through the stage of the education process. In investigating school enrolment rates in Zimbabwe Nziramasanga (1999) found that the prevalence of school dropouts is highest among girls. In Zimbabwe, the enrolment figures in secondary school for girls continue to decline in relation to those of boys. FAWE (2006) revealed that in 1987 in Matebeland South girls made up 45% of enrolment in form one but in form four this slipped to 36.6%. Such a slip does not augur well for a country which wants to develop its human resources from both sexes for better national development. In another study carried by Chadzoka (2008) on Primary school dropouts in Mutare, Zimbabwe the researcher found that female dropouts presented a greater percentage of 59% as compared to male dropouts who showed 51%.

Bridgeland et al (2006) echo that despite career aspirations that require education beyond high school, circumstances in girl learners' lives and inadequate response to these circumstances lead to school dropout. The situation for many girls therefore demands urgent attention. The problem requires emergency action if the nations are to advance. Considering the benefits derivable in the education of the girl child, it is the intention of this study to find reasons why girls drop out of school in a bid to find solutions to this problem.

Statement of the Problem

Many children especially girls are denied education which is a basic human right. Girls are still less likely to enroll and remain in school. With the introduction of the universal basic education and free education in most countries all school going children are expected to enroll and complete basic school. Yet hundreds of thousands of school going children especially girls are not in school (UNESCO, 2006). Girl child dropout rate remains high and this poses a threat to the development of the country. Effects of the girl child dropping out of school are many. The girl child herself, the parents or guardians, teachers, local community and the nation as a whole are affected (Mawere, 2012). Benefits that accrue to a country by having a literate population are multidimensional. It thus, becomes imperative to study determinants of girl child school dropouts. Circumstances in girl children's lives lead them to drop out. The situation demands urgent attention. The study therefore, sorts to investigate factors contributing to girl child's dropout at secondary school levels.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to document the causal factors responsible for the high rate of girl child school dropouts at secondary school level. The study also sort to suggest what could be done to curb such high girl child school dropouts.

Research questions

The study was designed to answer the following research questions.

- i) What are the factors which contribute to girl child dropout at secondary level?
- ii) What recommendations can be suggested?

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's hierarchy of needs informs this study. The theory of motivation was developed in the 1940s. Within his model there are five sets of needs or goals namely; physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization (Cunningham, 2008). The basic needs are organized in an order according to relative prepotency. Maslow (1943a) asserted that thwarting or threatening basic human goals is perceived as a psychological threat that can harm the individual's ability to function. When needs are not met negative consequences can emerge.

Physiological Needs

The first level of needs are physiological needs which are at the bottom of the triangle. Cunningham (2008) says according to the theory physiological survival is considered to be the most basic human motivator. According to Maslow physiological needs are the most demanding of satisfaction and include biological drives such as food, water, and sleep.

Safety Needs

If the physiological needs are met the individual concerned will be faced with safety needs. Safety needs refer to the need for being secure and protected. Physical safety, financial security, protection from harm and obtaining adequate materials to sustain survival are considered to be safety needs within the framework (Cunningham, 2008).

Belonging and Love Needs

This represents the third level of needs. The love, affection and belongingness needs emerge to motivate behavior. They refer to the need to be loved and accepted by other people.

Esteem Needs

According to Maslow, esteem needs are the need to have respect, confidence and admiration of others. Boys and teachers at school lack respect for girls' sexual maturation which creates problem of self esteem for girls. Magwa (2006:37) points out that as a result girls become less confident even in academic circles. This will then lead to some girls eventually dropping out of school. Cunningham (2008) points out that people who have satisfied their esteem needs tend to be highly productive and well adjusted. Gendered practice of giving value to a boy child by educating him in place of a girl child when there is a financial strain in the family makes girl child loose esteem.

Self actualization

It is the summit of the hierarchy of needs (http://www.abahe.co.uk/free-En-resources/Theories_of-Management/Maslow-Hierarchy-of-Needs.pdf).

It refers to the need to become all that one is capable of being to develop one's fullest potential. Maslow (1943:10) was insistent about the value and importance of self-actualization: "*What a man can be, he must be.*"

In Maslow's theory there are some important implications for girl child school dropout. Large numbers of girls are denied the right to education. There are many obstacles that make girls quit school thereby shattering their dreams. Motivation in the home environment and school is an important factor in encouraging girl learners to continue with their studies. Motivated learners remain involved in learning tasks. As echoed by Dekeza- Tsomo (2012) motivation energizes learners to achieve their goals. Safety needs are especially proponent during early years. The average child tends to prefer a safe orderly world. In a situation where girl learners encounter sexual abuse or travel long distances where they fear wild animals and rapists, their safety needs are thwarted leading to school dropouts. If love and belonging needs are not met, girl children drop out of school. Forcing a girl child into marriage for example, makes the child loose sense of love and belonging. The child's psychosocial functioning is damaged. Due to poverty some girl learners may fail to get sanitary provisions during menstruation and will avoid going to school due to fear of spoiling dress as this will result in them being mocked resulting in losing self esteem. Parents failing to pay cost of

school resources might result in girls facing peer pressure and be discouraged from attending school. If girls' needs are not met they drop out of school failing to reach their potential. They fail to self actualize.

Methodology

The research was a case study focusing on Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. The qualitative method was mainly used to gain an insight into the perceptions and feelings of teachers, parents and girl learners on causes of girl child school dropouts. Qualitative studies aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. Hossain (2011:145) asserts that qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, to identify how their experiences and behaviors are shaped by the contexts of their lives such as the social, economic, cultural and physical contexts. Qualitative methods produce information only on the particular cases studied. The quantitative approach was also used to a limited extent to determine the prevalence and frequency of opinions and perceptions of the sampled on girl child school dropouts.

Within the qualitative approach the study adopted a case study research design. A case study is a field of inquiry that investigate a specific area in order to gain access to the real life context where the problem is clearly visible (Punch 2000:15). It is an intensive in-depth study of a specific individual, group or institution in a specific context. The case study design was used because the researchers wanted to have a clear understanding of why and how girl child school dropout happens.

The population of the study comprised of teachers, parents and girl learners. Purposive sampling was used to select four secondary schools from the district. Purposive sampling seeks individuals and sites that can best supply relevant information needed to answer research questions raised (Cresswell, 2008:214).The sample size consisted of 20 teachers, 12 learners and 8 parents giving a total of 40 participants.

Data was collected using two major instruments namely the questionnaire and interview. Yin (2003) propounds that a combination of multiple sources of evidence within a study of the same phenomenon compensates the weaknesses in each single method by counter-balancing strengths of another, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation of the research results. The use of questionnaires was effective in that it gave respondents ample time to respond at their own time without interfering with their work. The aim of the interviews was to complement and substantiate data collected from questionnaires.

Results and Discussion

The main purpose of the study was investigating the factors contributing to girl child school dropout. It emerged from the study that many factors influence the girl's inability to continue with education. These factors are presented and discussed in this section.

All the participants were asked if they agreed or disagreed that more girls drop out of school as compared to boys. Their responses are given in table 1 below.

Table 1: Girls Drop Out of School More Than Boys.

Category	SA	A	SD	D	Total
Teaches	9	8	1	2	20
Learners	6	3	2	1	12
Parents	2	3	1	2	8
Total	17	14	4	5	40

Key

SA – Strongly agree

A- Agree

SD- Strongly disagree

D-Disagree

From the table it can be noted that 77.5% of the participants were of the view that girls drop out of school more than boys. Only 22.5% thought this is not the situation. In a study carried by Chadzoka on school drop outs in Mutare, Zimbabwe, the main findings were that female dropouts presented a greater percentage of 59% as compared to male dropouts who showed 41%.

Poverty and gendered social practices

It emerged from the study that poverty lies at the heart of many of the challenges that hinder girls' access to education. From both the interviews and questionnaires the poor socio economic status of girls was said to impose great constraint upon girls' continuing with their education. Parents were said to be unable to pay for the fees and other school resources like uniforms. Similarly in a study carried out by Alika and Egbochuku (2009) on school dropouts, they found that poverty ranked highest with 53% of respondents indicating that poverty was responsible for their dropping out of school.

Results from this study indicated that when in a financial strain, parents opt to withdraw the girl child from education and further the education of the boy child. Supporting this view, one parent had this to say;

Girls are withdrawn from education when families have financial burdens simply because they will get married, so it will be wastage since the husband's family will benefit.

Thus, it was agreed that when the economic situation gets tight girls are withdrawn from education giving priority to boys. Gendered attitudes in society make parents to support the boy child. It emerged that as a result of poverty some girls lack adequate sanitation. Adolescent girls who menstruate may miss out school for a week. Similarly, Magwa in his 2006 study found out that girls miss school as they try to grapple with problems arising from lack of protective clothing and sanitary towels or pads. In a situation where a girl is menstruating amid poor environment a girl may decide to miss school and will eventually dropout.

Early Marriage

Findings from the study revealed that early marriage is a contributing factor to girl child dropping out of school at secondary level. The study pointed out that early marriage was as a result of poor socio-background and also some religious customs. Early marriage as also echoed by Alika and Egbochuku (2009) is a socio cultural factor that hinders a girl child's access to school. Participants pointed out that in Zimbabwe for instance, poor parents give their daughters to wealthy people. This custom is known as *Kuzvarira*. This finding is in line with Zombwe et al (2010) who assert that there are traditions that dictate a dowry to be paid while a girl is still a child. When a girl child reaches puberty she is forced to stop school so as to get married. Moyo and Muvezwa in (Stewart, 2004) also found that religious beliefs also affect girl's persistence in school. Both the study and Moyo and Movezwa concur that for example, in Zimbabwe most girl children of the apostolic faith religion sect are married as soon as they reach puberty. The belief within the church being that girls' role is to marry and bear children and that they will be looked after by their husbands. They believe that girls should only have minimum schooling and be married off at puberty.

Ten million girls a year experience early or forced marriage which is one girl in every three seconds. One in every three girls in the developing countries is married by the age of 18 and one out of every seven girls in the world's poorest countries is married before their fifteenth birthday. In countries like Niger, Chad, Mali and Bangladesh and Guinea the rate of early and forced marriage is 60% (<http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/breaking-vows-early-and-forced-marriage>) and Girls –

Education.pdf). Marriage before the age of eighteen (18) should not be permitted for children since they do not have the full maturity and capacity to act.

Teenage Pregnancy

Teen pregnancy is viewed as a social problem, resulting in the pregnant teen dropping out of school. Pregnancy is a common cause of many girl children dropping out of school as revealed by the study. These findings are also noted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. According to the Ministry, 122 girls dropped out of school in Beitbridge as a result of pregnancies with 65% of them below the age of 16. Thus teenage pregnancy as also expressed by Sabates et al (2010) is a factor that could explain the higher risk for school dropout for girls.

Asked what they attributed to as causes of teen pregnancy. The following were reasons given

- Sexual abuse by family members, teachers and strangers. One learner lamented that levels of sexual activity among high school students are on the rise. Still on this point one learner had this to say;
Peer pressure and the modern technology lead to girl children engaging in sexual activities.
- Poverty was also said to contribute to sex. To secure support for their schooling, girls were said to engage in sex with sugar daddies and in turn get pregnant. Poverty drives to teenage pregnancy.

Zombwe et al (2010) concur that the poverty can lead girls into transactional sex. Zombwe et al also note that distance from school affects girls' attendance since they will be afraid of rapists. Research by Arnsworth cited in Seka (2012) in Tanzania indicates that dropouts increase in areas where distance to school is longer. Girls may be vulnerable to sexual abuse when they have to travel the long distance and this will also result in pregnancy.

Recommendations

The problem requires urgent action to be put in place. The study recommends the following

- As demonstrated in this report, promoting girl's right to education requires the engagement of many stakeholders. Government will need to increase financing to make sure that education will provide all girls with quality education.
- The nation should introduce initiative to lower costs of schooling to ease financial burden on families. All deserving girl children need to benefit from Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). Basic Education Assistance Module provides financial assistance to children from families which struggle to meet costs of education. The parents need to be conscientised on the importance of girl's education. Parents need to be advised to motivate their girl children to remain in school.
- There is need for curriculum review to accommodate sexual maturation and facilitate proper management of sexual maturation experiences. Girl children need to be empowered to manage menstruation.
- Some study need to be done in other districts so as to establish other factors causing girls' school dropout.

Conclusion

The study has confirmed that while girls grow up with boys they are made to grow up differently and are not given same support as boys. It is not wise to undermine girls' education. Education is a right. Education facilitates development of any nation. All evils which undermine girls' educational rights should be done away with. Girls are entitled to education by virtue of being human.

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