

Girl Child Abuse in Primary Schools: A Case Study of Lelmen Location, Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined home environment and girl child's abuse in Primary schools of Baringo County, Lelmen location in Kenya. The study was prompted by the high rate of girl child dropout, especially due to early pregnancies and early marriages. This study was based on specific objective of examining: the economic factor that influence the girl child abuse and the social- political factors that promote girl child abuse in Lelmen location. The study was designed in a comparative paradigm using a descriptive and correlation Research design. Using a cross sectional survey design, data was collected from 119 pupils using a closed ended questionnaire 111 parents, 4 Head teachers, 2 District officers and 42 teachers were interviewed. The of research revealed that poverty, forced labour, lack of skilled labour and poor background results into economic problems that cause girl child abuse in primary schools in Lelmen Location The study findings also indicated that political instability, cultural norms, genital mutilation, gender inequality, weak laws and inferiority complex are the socio-political causes of girl child abuse in primary schools in Baringo-county Lelmen location.

Key Words: Family, Environment, Girl Child Abuse, Schools

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, children have been abused in many ways without considering them as human beings. This has been so because they were regarded as children who would not be offended as they were seen to be ignorant of their right as children.

Bitangaro (1998) defines child abuse as psychological torture subjected on the minds the children which has paramount negative effect on the psychological growth of the children. Katsikano et al (2001) argue that when children are treated badly, the act remains permanent. He continues to say that the forms of child abuse as insults, torture, and sexual abuse. He stresses that this is caused by poverty, orphanage, drug dependency, poor government policies, peer influence and indiscipline. Worldwide, child abuse, has been a common phenomenon which promoted the adoption of laws in 1948. One proclaimed by the general assembly resolution 217 (III) December 10th 1948 children were considered but on limited basis. Article 5 of the human right report says that none shall be subjected to torture or cruel treatment or punishment. However, this clause has not been adhered to as most children have been exposed to torture, cruelty and punishment inspite of their rights. In 1989, the convention on the right of the children was adopted by the general assembly to protect children. Article 4 of the right of children says that states parties shall undertake to protect the children from exploitation and sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

In the area of the study, the communities tend to exploit the children such as where the male adults including the relatives and step fathers, some teachers and employers sexually exploit the girl child within the schools. The intimidation and heavily punishment have caused them permanent scars. In most families, children's rights have been neglected and abused most especially when it comes to education. Most children are kept at home looking after cattle and assisting as labourers though every child has a fundamental right to education.

The Kenyan government has great concern in the provision of resources to improve the welfare of the children. At all levels of administration there is a person responsible for the welfare of the children. The environment and poverty levels are some of the causes of child abuse. In the rural and urban slums, families focus on the immediate survival needs than their children's behaviour.

The children are therefore left to their peers who often mislead them. In the urban slums areas, family setting tends to be overcrowded since most can't afford more than one room. This is replicated in the rural areas, where children share small rooms and can overhear what their parents do in terms of sexual matters at night. They go out to practice the same.

Most families in the area of study are poor thus the girls are seen as a source of wealth from their bride price. The girls are also relegated to the kitchen and are seen as a source of domestic labour, therefore they have no time to concentrate on their studies hence denied the right to education.

In 1995, the child statute report was inaugurated in the Kenyan parliament to protect children against all forms of child abuse. All these have not been fully implemented to the environment factors surrounding the girl child especially in the area of study. This prompted the researcher to carry out a study to find out home environment and consequently girl child abuse in primary schools of Baringo county Lelmen location. Although the government of Kenya has put an alternative action on the protection of the right of children, their rights have often been abused or violated and sometimes it looks as if the rights do not exist especially in the rural setting. This is what instigated the researcher to find out whether Home environment play a major role in the girl child abuse in Lelmen location.

Economic Factors and Girl Child Abuse

Literature reveals that economic factors in a bigger extent cause girl child abuse in many communities. For instance, Dodha (1988) stresses that economic background of the girls' parents is an important factor among other factors to consider when discussing child abuse. He stresses that the family in which a girl comes from is very important, in that poverty using per capita income as an important indicator has greatly accelerated the abuse of the girl child. Low income within the family put the girl child at risk and makes her vulnerable to sexual harassment related to inducement by the rich men. He points out that girls are sexually abused in most rural areas where poverty has roots.

In the same vein, Anand and Harris (1994) Agree with Dodha (1988) that parents in most communities affected by poverty have exchanged the girls for money. Parents have forced girls out of schools temporary to be at home before being given away to rich men in order to get money for survival. He stresses that this stunning picture is most common in sub Saharan Africa countries and East Asian countries such as Bangladesh. Anand and Harris, (1994). Further revealed that girls have been subjected to forced labour especially in families depending on the agriculture sector. Some parents in sub Saharan communities take girls as wage labourors in farms of rich people. They argue that girls can provide cheap labour supply especially where plantation agriculture has taken roots.

Shaffer Paul, (1994) stresses that poverty within the family determines where the family lives. In urban and pre-urban setting of the world, poverty has forced girls to practice prostitution. The findings of Shaffer Paul (1994) agree with findings of compassion report (2000) that in slums of Bwaise, Kivulu, Kisenyi and Katanga in Kampala, girls parade themselves for sexual business on the streets due to in economic deprivation by the parents. The study revealed that most of the girls were ignored by the parents due to lack of funds to take them to school, whereas some were neglected and abandoned by parents due to lack of financial support. Girl children therefore become expensive to manage and parents abandoned them.

UNDP report (1990) reported that in sub Saharan Africa, there is a mass migration of semi and unskilled labour force, notably young girls and boys, from up country to urban areas. The report stressed that this shift is related to lack of basic necessities in families; girls especially prefer to work as house maids in urban areas to get money for survival. These girls are subjected to hard labour, house chores, and in some cases their bosses sexually abuse them while these girls live in denial so that their bosses cannot chase them away. Sen. A (1984) Revealed that the global child trafficking particularly in East Asia for sexual tourism is related to poverty within the family of parents. He notice that parents sell their children to trafficking companies in disguise of job provision, these young –virgins girls as they are called find themselves in Thailand coastal beaches where they are sexually exploited. He stresses that India has been leading in the number of girls being trafficked. Kofi Annan (1998) observed that girl child abuse is on the increase in sub Saharan Africa and governments have failed to sign to children rights charter which clearly stipulates that the abuse is more pronounced in rural area primary schools which are at the periphery of the country. He revealed that in sub Saharan African, poverty is the major concern, it is a major source of all problems including violence and girl child abuse.

Socio-Political Factors that Cause Girl Child Abuse

Dadha (1988) reported that in northern Uganda children have been abused. He stresses that the alarming death of children and abduction has left the government discredited. He reported that insurgency of lord resistance army has traumatized the children of Abuke primary school who were forcibly abducted by the rebels. The girls were turned into child mothers thereby affecting their psychological growth. He reported that while the activities of insurgents had dangerous effects on pupils, others were rescued, rehabilitated and integrated into the main stream schools.

Ofonno (2000) in his annual report on child abuse at the UN summit reported that western Sudan has been mostly hit and affected by political instability instigated by the government of Khartoum. He stresses that the conditions in this region is pathetic, children lack food, shelter and are affected and infected by HIV/AIDS. They lack the basic medical care while the government of northern Sudan and international organizations have done nothing to rest the situation.

Anand and Harris (1994) further indicated that the girl's child abuse is embedded in the culture of some communities. They noted that female genital mutilation among some communities denies girls children.

Compassion report (2000) concurs with Anninis finding, who found out that poor background has to some extent contributed to the girl child abuse.. The findings of Anond and Harris agree with finding of Uganda human right commission that most girls particularly in eastern Uganda have escaped from their homes running away from this primitive cultural practice.They stress that cultural practices have instigated gender inequality with the male sex being emphasized at the expense of the female sex. Females are denied many rights and in most cases they are abused. Parents in some communities still look at female education with negative attitudes and they argue that education of girls is a waste of time and money since she will be married off and taken care of by the men. They emphasizes that these attitude is also evident in some governments which discriminate against the girl child.. Few governments have signed united nation convention against female discrimination. Weak government laws coupled with cultural factors have predisposed girl child at risk. The defilement rate in Kenya is also on increase and its effects have been devastating on the girl child.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in five primary schools. The study population was composed of 474 people, who included 5head teachers, 55 teachers,178 parents, 3 district educational Officers and 233 Standard Eight pupils. Tables 1, 2 and 3 denote this information.

Table 1. Population of pupils in Chesango, Salawa, Makonai, Kapruk and Muchukwa primary schools

Schools	Population of pupils	Boys	Girls
Chesango	45	30	15
Salawa	40	30	10
Makonai	43	23	20
Kapruk	48	39	09
Muchukwa	57	43	14
T0tal	233	165	68

Source: District Education Officer Lelmen Location Head teacher's Offices of the five schools.

Table 2. Population of district officers, head teachers, teachers and parents in the schools at Lelmen Location, Barinngo County

Schools	Chesango	Salawa	Makonai	Kapruk	Muchukwa	Total
District officers						3
Head teachers	1	1	1	1	1	5
Std 8 teachers	10	12	9	11	13	55
Parents	40	32	33	42	31	178
Grand Total	51	45	43	54	45	241

Sources: Head teacher's office of the five schools.

The sample size comprised of 278 respondents of whom 119 were pupils, 2 Educational Officers, 4Head teachers, 42 teachers and 111 parents. the sample Size was arrived at using the predetermined sample size table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) as cited Amin(2005).

Table 3. Sample size

Respondents	Population	Sample Size
Pupils	233	119
Head teachers	5	4
District Officers	3	2
Teachers	55	42
Parents	178	111
Total	474	278

The study adopted Slovincs formula to calculate the sample size. A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from the pupils for easy tapping of data that could be correlated (Amin, 2005). The respondent's opinions on the items on the questionnaire were enlisted on a 4 point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

An unstructured interviewed guide was used for collecting indepth information from the district officers, Head teachers, teachers and parents as suggested by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) and Kakoza (1999). Simple random sampling technique was used to select the schools. The names of the five schools were put in a rota out of which the five schools were selected randomly. Cluster sampling was used and the five schools formed five clusters from which the respondents were selected. Out of each cluster, a list of pupils were obtained from the head teachers offices and the names of the pupils put in a Rota. They were then selected using simple random sampling procedure. The researcher purposely selected the parents, Head teachers and teachers. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design to make generalizable inferences about the influence of home environment and girl child abuse.

Quantitative approach was adopted to establish the effects of one variable on another, since it allowed for collecting numeric data on observable individual behavior of samples then subjecting those data to statistical analysis (Amin 2005). A qualitative approach was also adopted to captured data not captured in from the quantitative approach.

RESULTS

In this sub- section the detailed analysis, interpretation and presentation of data about Home environment and girl child abuse in primary schools in Baringo county was discussed.

Economic Factors and Girl Child Abuse in Lelmen Location

To investigate the above research question, various questions were asked in the questionnaire and interview guide. The results are presented below.

Table 4. Economic factors that have encouraged girl child abuse in Lelmen location in order of impact

Economic factors	Frequency	Total
Poverty	95	37.2%
Forced labor	70	25.2%
Lack of skilled labor	45	16.2%
Poor back ground	68	24.5%
Total	278	100%

Source: Data collected from the field.

From table 4, 95(37.2%) reported that poverty is an economic factor contributing to girl child abuse in primary school in Lelmen location , 70(25.1%) reported forced labor, 45(16.2%) reported lack of skilled labor and lastly 68(24.5%) reported that girl child abuse is caused by poor background of learners in primary school in Lelmen location.

Socio-Political Factor and Girl Child Abuse in Lelmen Location

Table 5. Socio-political factors that have encouraged girl child abuse in Lelmen Location

Socio-political factors	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Political instability	53	19.10%
Government policy	35	12.60%
Cultural norms	45	16.20%
Genital mutilation	57	20.50%
Gender inequality	30	10.80%
Weak government laws	25	9.00%
Inferiority complex	33	11.90%
Total	278	100%

Source: Date collected from the field.

From table 5, 53(19.1%) reported political instability, 35(12.6%) reported government policy, 45(16.2%) reported cultural norms, 57(20.5%) reported genital mutilation, 30(10.8%) reported that gender inequality, and 25(9.0%) reported weak government laws and Lastly, 33(11.9%) reported inferiority complex of girls as some of the socio-political factor that caused girl child abuse in Lelmen location, Baringo County.

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussions

The findings indicate that poverty is a major economic factor that has encouraged girl child abuse. These findings are similar to the findings of staffer Paul (1994) that indicate that poverty within the family determines where the family lives. Poverty has forced the children to live in slums where most girls practice child prostitution.

The study also revealed that forced labor is an economic factor that has caused girl child abuse. These findings agree with the findings of UNDP report (1990) that in sub-Saharan Africa There is mass migration of unskilled labor force from up country areas to urban areas, notably young girls boys.

The report stressed that this shift is related to lack of basic necessities in families. The report stressed girl have to work as house maids in urban areas to get money for survival. These young girls are subjected to hard labor, chores, and in some cases their bosses sexually abuse and they live in denial in fear of bearing chased away.

Lastly, the study found out that poor background of the learners was another economic factor that caused girl child abuse. These findings agree with the findings of compassion report (2000) that poor background has to some extent contributed to girl child abuse.

The study also found out that political instability is sociopolitical factors that cause girl child education. These findings agree with findings of Onno (2000) in his annual report on child abuse at UN summit that, western Sudan has been mostly hit and affected by political instability instigated by government of Khartoum. He stresses that Darfur region has for the past two decades been hit by Arab rebels who rape girls children lack food, shelter, medical care and some are infected by HIV/AIDS due to rape and defilement.

The study further revealed that government policy is also another socio-political factor that causes girl child abuse. These findings are similar to those of Dadha (1998) who reported child abuse in northern Uganda and stressed that the alarming rates of children abductions had left the government discredited.

The study also found out that cultural norms are also socio-political factors that cause girl child abuse in Lelmen location. Some of the culture believes held that the girl child was a weaker sex and therefore uneconomical since it was believed that even if they were educated, they would still go back and be housewives. These findings agree with findings of the Anand and Harris (1994) that girl child abuse is emended in the culture of some communities. They noted that female genital mutilation is engraved in the culture of some communities denying the girls an opportunity to fully enjoy their potential especially sexual satisfaction. They noted that some culture in East Africa carry out genital mutilation against the will

The study further revealed that gender inequality had also caused girl child abuse as most families valued a boy child and ignored the presence of a girl. These findings agree with the findings of Annand and Harris (1994) that cultural practices have instigated guider

inequality, where male sex has been emphasized at the expense of female sex. Female are denied rights and in most cases their rights are abused. They argue that education of girl is a waste of resources and time since she will be married off and taken care of by another man.

Lastly, the study found out that weak laws caused girl child abuse as most of the law breakers were not penalized as required either due to corruption or injustice in courts. These findings concur with the findings of Annad and Hariss (1994) that weak government laws coupled with cultural factors have pre-disposed girl at risk. The defilement rate in Kenya is on increase and its effects has been divesting on girls.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that both economical and social background plays a big role on the girl child abuse. Economical factors specifically poverty affects most of the girls as they are always forced into early marriages in exchange for dowry. Poverty also causes the girl child to move from the rural areas into the urban areas in search of a better life where in most cases she is subjected into hard working conditions as a house help or influenced into prostitution.

Most of the young girls are denied the opportunities to study and are rather used to do domestic chores such as digging and rearing of cattle with the premise that it is of utter hopelessness to educate the girl child because she will be married and taken care of by their husband.

The results in this study indicated that not only do economic factors promote girl child abuse but also the social background plays a relatively bigger part. Genital mutilation was blamed as one of the ways of abuse most young girls face in the study area. It was indicated that the practice is culturally based and is practiced without considering the repercussions that it might even cause death.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the government should legislate laws on the children rights against abuse and it should strengthen sensitization campaign against child abuse in communities

The government should ensure that they solve political questions peacefully and through peace talks rather than military approaches. Again, the study recommends that strict laws should be put against rape defilement and forced labor.

Human rights bodies should also be formed to sensitize masses to report any complaint on abuse. Negative cultural attitude should also be stopped in communities that practice them such as female genital mutilation.

Women empowerment movements should be formed to ensure that they fight for the rights of their children.

Emphasis should be given to the girl child in terms of education and support to enable them achieve basic education and equal opportunities enforced in the employment sectors both in the government and the non- governmental organizations

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BIO-DATA

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