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THE CAUSES OF FEMALE STUDENT DROPOUT IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE DADAAB REFUGEE CAMPS OF KENYA

ARTE SAMAN DAGANE

*Member of the Dadaab Response Association
Graduate of the Master of Education, York University
Borderless Higher Education for Refugees Program*

ABDULLAHI YUSSUF ADEN

*Graduate of the Master of Education, York University
Borderless Higher Education for Refugees Program*

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Authors: Arte Saman Dagane, Abdullahi Yussuf Aden

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Executive Summary</u>	4
<u>1. Introduction</u>	5
<u>2. Literature Review: Factors Contributing to Girls Dropping Out</u>	8
<u>2.1 Cultural Expectations</u>	8
<u>2.2 Early Pregnancy and Marriage</u>	9
<u>2.3 Family Attitudes toward Education</u>	10
<u>2.4 Household Income</u>	10
<u>2.5 School-related Factors</u>	11
<u>3. Methodology</u>	12
<u>3.1 Selection of Participants</u>	12
<u>3.2 Interviews</u>	12
<u>3.3 Data Analysis</u>	13
<u>3.4 Participant Overview</u>	13
<u>4. Primary Causes of Female Dropout in Dadaab Refugee Camps</u>	17
<u>4.1 Family Relationships</u>	17
<u>4.2 Family Education</u>	20
<u>4.3 Household Income</u>	21
<u>4.4 Gendered Family Cultural Traditions</u>	23
<u>4.5 School-Related Factors</u>	24
<u>5. Girl Child Education Services in Dadaab Contexts</u>	27
<u>6. Conclusion</u>	35
<u>7. Recommendations</u>	39
<u>Works Cited</u>	42

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is a modified version of a Major Research Paper for the Master of Education degree at York University as part of the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees project, which provides education to the community living in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. This collaborative paper investigates and discusses the causes and consequences of female student dropout in a secondary school in the Dadaab refugee camps. It adopted a qualitative research design, conducting individual interviews with four female participants: two currently in school and two who have dropped out.

Family relationships, family education, household income, gendered traditions and school-related factors emerged as key factors influencing the decision to drop out or stay in school.

Family members who encourage female students contribute to retention, while household financial difficulties, gendered traditions, and aspects of the school system such as a lack of female teachers contributes toward dropout. The structure of the education system, policies, practices and the role of the school, implementing organizations, and the community were emphasized. We conclude with recommendations for teachers, schools and NGOs: introducing cash payments to support families with girls in school, sensitizing the community about the significance of education for girls, involving parents and family members in girls' education, setting up measures to monitor student attendance with regular follow-up, employing more female teachers in schools, establishing peer mentoring partnerships, and involving female learners in policy decisions.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a modified version of a Major Research Paper for the Master of Education degree at York University as part of the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees project, which provides virtual education to refugees in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. Education is the right of every child. It is a basic need and a priority for emergency responses in a refugee context. It is also a tool for protection and for peace, as well as an investment toward sustainable development. The Dadaab refugee camps in North-Eastern Kenya is one protracted refugee situation where there is a wide gap in educational opportunities and outcomes. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) acknowledges that fewer girls enroll in secondary schools than their male counterparts in Dadaab, although school-age girls outnumber boys in the refugee population (UNHCR 2018).

Refugee girls have the right to education like any other child in the world. There is, however, a notable gender gap as retention becomes a significant challenge in secondary schools for refugee girls, posing an overwhelming situation that needs increased attention.



The UNHCR stresses this gap:



refugee girls at secondary level are only half as likely to enroll in school as their male peers...for refugee girls, it is even tougher to find – and keep – a place in the classroom. As they get older, refugee girls face more marginalization and the gender gap in secondary schools grows wider - **UNHCR 2018**



Girls' education is essential in a displacement context to enable girls to reintegrate well both in the host and home countries, which is why in recent years their access to education is receiving more attention than usual. The goal is to bridge the gap and contribute to the management of the global refugee crisis. Refugee education is vital, particularly for girls to achieve self-development, to break community perceptions towards female education, and to gather hope for the future. Reduced education completion limits development and deprives girls of achieving full potential (Somani 2017: 133). Girl's educational achievement is significant as education empowers people. The voice of educated girls tends to inspire and influence the community and address challenges that might fuel inequality (Somani 2017). Lamb et al. (2010) argue that dropout at the secondary school level needs attention as the level of education sets the foundation to higher educational study and for other opportunities that would prepare a person to enjoy benefits in life.

retention (2013: 119). These are attributed to increased demands and burdens in home life such as household chores and cultural expectations which cause girls' disengagement from schooling. The prevalence of disparity in education, particularly at the secondary level, is in contrast to the third Millennium Development Goal: to "promote gender equality and empower women" (UN DESA 2016). Despite the existence of free secondary education in the Dadaab camps, where diverse projects focus on girls or women, there is still a gender gap between the ratio of high school girls to boys.

As two graduate students in the Master of Education Program with York University, Canada, we have gained a strong appreciation and understanding of how education can transform lives. We both began our studies in the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) Project, starting with the Increased Access and Skills for Tertiary Education Program (INSTEP), followed by the Teacher Training Certificate Program, and lastly the undergraduate degree. Since 2013, the BHER Project has exposed us to academic practices, knowledge, and scholars with whom we would have never had the opportunity to engage from within the camps. Through bringing higher education to refugees and the host community in Dadaab, we have been given the opportunity of studying within an emergency zone.

There are many factors that contribute to girls' dropout. Many studies have documented the causes of girls dropping out around the world.

We acknowledge the prevalence of students dropping out from all parts of the world, but



there is reason to investigate why the rate of dropout remains higher for girls than boys in the Global South and in refugee camps (Damas 2016: 9). Every year of secondary schooling in Dadaab, the frequency of dropouts increases.

There may be a number of possible factors, inside and outside the family, perpetuating the high dropout rate of secondary school girls in the refugee camps of Dadaab, Kenya. Female school dropout is a critical issue as it challenges overall education achievement. The non-completion of high school will limit students' opportunities and achievement and increase the burden in the society.

This paper is seeking to better understand the factors that force girls to drop out of their secondary studies. We therefore established the following goals to guide this study. We aim to: 1) Explain the current scenario of females learning in secondary schools in Dadaab refugee camps and describe associated inequalities; 2) Elaborate the primary causes of girls dropping out of schools and analyze these through lived experiences 3) Recommend measures to overcome the barriers related to female education in the camps to achieve equal learning opportunities. A case study was conducted in Hilac Secondary School (pseudonym), one of the three NGO-supported secondary schools in Dadaab.

We were interested in this topic for a number of reasons. First, as current and past teachers, we are committed to providing accessible education to all children, youth and adults. We believe education will be the key factor allowing us to rebuild and develop our home nations. We are concerned about the high female dropout rate. We also have young children who we hope have fair access to education. We want girls and women to have equal rights at all levels of society, particularly education, as it will be a strong tool for them to work and achieve future goals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GIRLS DROPPING OUT

Harber argues that “education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth” (2014: 18). Education liberates people from conditions that are imposed or came about as a result of circumstances. Barriers cut across education and deny female members of society the opportunity to attain their full potential and achieve self-fulfillment. Secondary school dropout of girls in the refugee camps is widespread. Kaprielian-Churchill (1996) writes about refugees and education, depicting the risks students encounter during their academic journey in relation to adolescence where completion gradually falls due to factors of performance, well-being disruption, early marriage, and attitude. This section examines factors that contribute toward female school dropouts, in particular cultural expectations, early pregnancy and marriage, family attitudes toward education, household income, and school-related factors.

2.1 CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

Wright and Plasterer (2012) explain that cultural practices challenge the system of education of refugees in the Dadaab camps, where no preference is given to female education. Sinclair emphasizes the provision of education in emergency areas and access to high school education “cannot be ignored” (2001: 52).

Sinclair also outlines the protection and inclusion purposes of education in emergency and points out that some parents give preference to boys’ education over girls when there are limited resources: “families often do not see girls’ education as a priority when money is scarce” (2001: 53). Kirk pinpoints unequal opportunities of education for girls and boys but also reveals a hope that if the situation is improved, girls can equally access education opportunities: “in most emergency situations, girls’ educational opportunities are more limited than boys...[yet] ‘windows of opportunity’ may also open up for girls and women to access education” (2006: 3). Other cultural and attitude factors are part of this disparity, as Harber describes:

“Access of female[s] to formal education can be reduced by parental attitudes to schooling, i.e. seeing it as a poor investment of time and money for girls... girls who are pregnant can drop out of school because parents withdraw them, or schools are not prepared to continue to educate them. Ensuing childcare responsibilities may then affect the possibilities for attendance (2014: 18-19).

Cultural and familial attitudes make girls and women more vulnerable and subordinate them relative to their male counterparts. Cultural factors tend to be a barrier to girls' academic achievement. Culture is part of everything people perform and affects girls' education as domination is prevalent in the cultural system

(Noori highlights that culture discriminates against girls or women by dictating what they should and should not do: a common Somali proverb states "A girl/woman should either be in the house or in grave" (2017: 113). This proverb depicts gender based discrimination of the highest magnitude and no doubt fuels girls to quit learning.

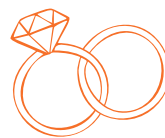
2.2 EARLY PREGNANCY AND MARRIAGE

Social relationships such as premarital affairs with the opposite sex are forbidden. Unmarried girls who become pregnant are either kicked out of the house or forced to marry someone to maintain the family's status in the community, causing those girls to leave school before graduation (Lloyd and Mensch 2008: 2). That indicates that one of the leading causes of girls' dropout is early and unplanned pregnancy, which can lead them to enter an arranged or forced marriage to avoid shame and retain respect for cultural norms of bearing children within wedlock. In addition, the study suggests that some girls abort pregnancy, which can leave them with complications that understandably increase the likelihood of leaving school. Sometimes, dropout is connected to the school environment where girls find the school social life hostile or unsafe.

Early pregnancy tends to exclude young girls from schooling as they face stigma and attendance pressures along with social challenges as Gyan outlines:

“ *Teenage pregnancy is one of the social ills that affect society. The existence of teenage pregnancy does not auger well for the development of the girlchild. This is attributable to the girls' age and the absence of any consistent means of support to care for the children and themselves when they should have been in school. It is alleged that teenage pregnancy and its associated motherhood are characterized with shame, disgrace, school dropout and sometimes end of the individual's dreams of achieving higher pursuits* (Gyan 2013: 53).

School dropout is attributed here to teenage or early pregnancy, along with social and domestic factors that tend to interrupt girls' schooling. Debe associates female dropout in secondary schools in Africa with early marriage and equally connects dropout with the irrelevance of education to the prevailing needs of the people, particularly economic (Stromquist 1990: 139).



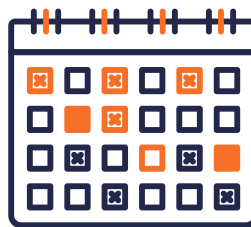
Early marriage leads to early motherhood, which increases the domestic responsibilities of girls and threatens their attendance at and completion of school.

Kirk (2006) remarks that early marriage and pregnancy contribute to female dropout in emergency contexts where some parents push their own daughters to get married due to economic pressures.

Other educational literature also found economic forces can lead girls to drop out from school. De Smedt (1998) argues that some girls get married early, particularly those who experienced family-related challenges and are willing to start new life basically for protection and to obtain economic support from their husbands. Mareng argues that marriage hampers performance as they may not be able to meet the expected grades, however much they cope with the household issues (2010: 478). Parents may entice or force, in some situations, young girls to get married to men who are economically stable and can contribute to family sustenance (Stromquist 1990).

2.3 FAMILY ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION

Al-Hroub (2014) correlates girls' dropout from school to a list of factors including: poor performance; absenteeism; behavioral issues; school environment and support; single-parent households; socio-economic conditions; family movement; attainment of education by other children in the family; parents' support level, attitude and expectations; and family stability. According to Stromquist (1990), socio-economic pressures as a result of patterns of community life often influence full attainment of education by women or girls. This reproduction of class and conceptual beliefs in view of economic status and culture respectively result in educational disparities from a gender lens.



Poor performance, absenteeism and dropouts are often associated with girls who experience low socioeconomic conditions.

Family culture plays a great role in learning. Dropout rate is high in families that value girls' education less due to behaviors such as punishment and autocratic approaches. Stromquist's concept is applicable in the Dadaab context where the refugee population comes from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences low economic conditions.

Girls also withdraw from the school due to pressures from the family on grounds of economic status, forcing their labour to meet family needs.

The situation is worse if parents are illiterate and totally hinder the girl's education, unlike the higher probability of attendance and completion with parents of a higher educational level. This pattern reflects the education system and specifically high school girls in Dadaab, where little motivation is offered to girls and their ability is challenged by domestic chores and family perception of female education. These low expectations create a situation of subordination of girls or women to men.

2.4 HOUSEHOLD INCOME

As Harber states, "Education is also seen to help people participate in society and control their environment more easily..." (2014: 18).

The skills attained through education enables people to have a voice in the community, enhances economic growth



sustained and improves social cohesion and equality. However, refugees are a low-income population that struggle with basic things such as access to schools, irregular attendance, poor retention and a higher dropout rate than the general population.

Families with economic difficulties may force girls to marry, as mentioned above. The general vulnerability of the refugee population in the context of income and rights allows the few refugees with a stable economic situation and the NGO workers to win the heart of mature school going girls easily due to their double disadvantage as women and as refugees. Such examples of exploitation are contrary to the way Asafu-Adjaye (2012) and Boertien and Härkönen (2018) view education, which they show correlates with greater economic returns and marriage stability due to the higher education of the person, particularly women. Generally, educated families often achieve a higher per capita income, and there is a positive correlation with children's school completion and achievement of potential.

2.5 SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS

Apart from the household factors, the school environment also contributes to girls' dropout in secondary schools in the refugee camp. Some girls may irregularly attend the school due to the large population and class sizes compared to the teachers available.

Large class sizes can push girls to drop learning as teachers rarely or never pay attention to their individual needs and the student-teacher ratio is extremely high. Attendance of female students who reside at a long distance from the school is also irregular and eventually hampers their studies, particularly if their parents do not motivate them to keep going (Boertien and Härkönen 2018). As Harber outlines "A key aspect of human capital theory is rates of return analysis, which assumes that it is education that is mainly responsible for the fact that the more educated earn more than the less educated. The rate of return is the rate of interest on what has been invested" (2014: 19). The notion is to stand with girls to get equal opportunities, improve environmental obstacles, and change values in the society that cause gender inequality. This study revolves around finding out the perception of girls and parents towards education with an emphasis on expectations, attendance and the nature of support girls are provided within the school and at home.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative method. Creswell defines qualitative research as:

“

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Khan 2014: 225).

”

A qualitative approach draws information from personal and social perspectives (Davies 2000). Attention is often paid to the social backgrounds of the people and meaning is constructed. Our qualitative method relies on interviews with four respondents. The case method approach that we use here attempts to find 'depth' and therefore draws information from a small population to uncover intimate experiences and behaviours (Ambert et al. 1995). Considerable interest is given to our participants explanations of various events or experiences in their daily social lives.

3.1 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

We selected two high school girls currently in their last year of studies and two girls who have dropped out but used to be in the same class.

The girls in their fourth year of secondary school (Form 4) were the respondents selected as they have stayed longer in the school than other levels. The four participants are all refugees 19 years of age and over and are all residing now in the Dadaab refugee camps. The two groups of girls helped us to get the necessary information on what helped some of them to continue their studies and why some dropped out of Hilac Secondary School. Potential participants were recruited by contacting them individually and briefing on the purpose of the research and its significance, which helped us to build effective rapport and trust amongst those collaborating. Pseudonyms were employed throughout the study for the purpose of providing protection to participants' identities. The participants can speak English well hence translation was not an issue. Our prior knowledge and interaction, as teachers and residents in the same locality, was an added advantage to provide insights for this study.

3.2 INTERVIEWS

The study focused on female students' admission at year 2016 until their year of completion, 2019. Research ethics procedures, including informed consent and confidentiality, guided the research. Interviews are a primary method to collect data from participants in qualitative research (Hatch 2002: 23).

Semi-structured interviews leave it open to the participants to share their experiences and understanding “in-depth” (King et al. 2018: 94). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to “express in their own ways and pace” (Jamshed 2014: 87). Edwards and Holland (2013) argue that semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to cover a large scope of information with the interviewee through a series of probing questions. These activate the interviewee’s mind to think critically in response to interviewer questions. It is characterized with flexibility and allows the interviewer to follow the interests of the interviewee (Edwards and Holland 2013: 29). Interviewers guide participants and motivate the participants to give more insight into the scenarios shared. The individual interview is important because it allows the respondent to speak freely, and potentially sparks more thoughts on the same idea of discussion, while maintaining more confidentiality than group methods. The interview questions for girls in school helped us know what supported them to continue their studies and for those no longer in school, what contributed to them dropping out.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Marshall and Rossman defined data analysis as

“the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Tilley 2016: 1)”

In our analysis, we assessed the content of the collected data and the literature, then identified patterns of specific relationships (Hatch 2002: 10). We transcribed the interviews, as Hycner (1985) documents, we collaboratively identified meaning in each unit, and finally we clustered meanings and summarized themes from the data. Transcripts were coded to create driving themes for the paper. The two groups of participants were compared under conditions of family experience, particularly the economic status and the education levels of their respective family members, which helped us to identify factors that keep one group in the school and the other out. Policies and practices of organizations implementing and supporting secondary education programs and girl child education projects were also explored.

3.4 PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

Pseudonyms	In school or dropped out
Fartun	In school
Halima	Dropped out
Natasha	In school
Siham	Dropped out

In this study, we interviewed four female participants: Fartun, Halima, Natasha and Siham. Two of the participants are in their fourth year of secondary school while the other two have dropped out from the same school in the same grade.

Fartun



Fartun was born in the Dadaab refugee camp. She is 22 years old now. She has seven siblings and she is the second born of her family. She started and finished her primary education in the camp. She has started her secondary education and is currently in her fourth year. In our discussions, she struck us as a committed student with a desire to realize her educational dream: to finish secondary education successfully. She spoke of her social nature, and how she is dedicated to interacting with her friends, both male and female students. She also highlighted the immense support that she receives from her parents, particularly her mother who helps with books, pens and other resources that supports her education. Her mother also ensures that there are fewer household activities so that she has enough time for her study. Fartun reads thoroughly both in the evening and early morning with the help of her parents and teachers to achieve her goals. She celebrates that the educational system in the Dadaab refugee camps is free and she is dedicated to going back to her country with a complete education when she returns home to Somalia. She is interested to become an advocate for girls' education in future. She actively participates in extra-curricular activities.

Halima



Halima is 25 years old. She was born in the camp and started her primary and secondary in the camp.

She was at Hilac Secondary School, but due to financial challenges with her family, she could not continue with her education. She decided to drop out of school when she was in her last year. She comes from a family of nine boys and four girls where she is the firstborn of her family. Her father died a long time ago, so all the children had to depend on her mother alone. Due to these heavy burdens, she decided to leave school and help her mother prepare enough food for the family table. Halima explained that she wanted to work to earn money to support her family. The situation forced Halima to work as a maid to one of the families in Dadaab. The work is not a part-time job where she can get a chance to attend her classes, as she must stay with that family to be available all the time for work. She was given a house to sleep.

During her time in school, she spoke about how she had interacted with many female and male students. In addition, she used to perform very well and participate in extra-curricular activities. Nonetheless, she had to help her mother prepare something for the rest of the family, and as a result she could not attend the class every day. But, she had a great relationship with her teachers and was enjoying school life all the time she was in school. Moreover, she talked about ways in which she was very passionate to create her future world at Hilac Secondary School. When she spoke in the interview, you could sense her curiosity and desire to become one of the great leaders in the world and to work on eradicating violence in her community. During the interview, we were struck by Halima's belief in education. She truly believes that education empowers the person to discover their unique talents, beauty, culture and happiness.

However, these great expectations did not come true for her. Halima really regrets dropping out. She wishes that others had spoken to her mother and shared the importance of her daughter's education and that she had been able to continue her studies.

Natasha



Natasha started her school in 2010. Now she is in her fourth year in high school. During our interview she talked about her lack of English. She is from South Sudan and follows the Christian faith. At first, she could not understand the languages taught apart from the few interactions with her colleagues who also spoke in a different vernacular. She lives with her mother who takes care of the family needs as her dad has passed on. She has a brother who is also in Form 4. Natasha feels the system is free here and that she needs to be a better person when she goes back to her country (South Sudan) and so she continues her studies in school. She associates education with the future of South Sudan. She has the ambition to finish high school and go to the next level of her studies. She is now making sure that she makes use of her teachers and the locally available resources. Her mother single-handedly contributes to her wellbeing at school. She spoke about how her mum is encouraged by the fact that education is free in the camp, her mum makes uniforms and makes other materials she may require available for her. Her mother has no job and therefore cannot afford to buy her books so often.

Natasha feels motivated because her siblings are in school despite the low-income status of their family. She has two brothers in high school: one in form four and others in the third year in high school. The rest of the siblings are in primary school. They all compete in their studies to make their mum happy. There is a tap stand at the proximity of the family house from which her mum fetches water. Her mum also prepares lunch for them. Once she returns from the school in the evening, she helps her mum in the family chores. In case of any challenge at home or school, Natasha looks up to her mum and one female teacher at school. Her interaction with her five female siblings and her mum made her feel comfortable to share her experiences and challenges with females. She cannot go to the males and talk to them about her fears or issues. At school, she is the Secretary of the Writers association. In terms of interaction with the teachers, she has never had any challenge or difference with the teachers from the start up to now. She always works closely with her teachers.

Her advice to the girls dropping out of school is to first of all analyze the situation. In case the issue is out of their control, they can seek help from other people. Natasha curiously says the school is the best place to be of benefit to oneself and the country. Since there is no hope of returning home because of the prevailing situations in the countries of origin, she says it is good to be in school and study hard. Lastly, there is a lot of knowledge taught at school ranging from life skills to science. Natasha told us that she wants to be a social worker in the future. While in school, Natasha interacted with so many people that gave her the courage to look for a job anywhere in the world.

In the future, she is adamant that she will benefit everybody, including the most disadvantaged members of the society.

Siham



Siham is 23 years old. Like the other participants, she was also born in the Dadaab refugee camp. Her family consists of eight members: father, mother and six children. In this case, she was the female child and the rest are male. She started and finished her primary education in the camps. After finishing primary education, she joined secondary education immediately in the year 2016 but, unfortunately, she left the education when she was in her third year. Both of her parents did not go to school. Her mother sells vegetables while the father rides a donkey cart in the market to generate money. Therefore, the family's economic situation is not stable, which makes her parents work hard to make sure that food is on the table for the children. Siham had a big dream when she was in secondary education. She wanted to become educated and achieve her goals so that she helps her family and the community at large. She was enjoying learning by taking part in both the academic and extra-curricular activities of the school. She was passionate to learn to have a bright future. She had a good relationship with her teachers and fellow students. However, this beautiful moment of hers was destroyed by her father. Her father proposed marriage to her for a man from one of the Western countries. The husband has gone to school but did not go for further education. The father was given a lot of money and accepted the proposal because he needed it.

She did not get any support from anybody including her teachers. With this situation, she even became more desperate and extremely stressed. She did not share this difficult situation with anyone even her closest friend. Due to the extreme pressure from her father, she decided to leave the school and accept to marry the man. She is still living in the camp and now caring for household activities. She finally ended up being a wife with three children and not working at all.

4. PRIMARY CAUSES OF FEMALE DROPOUT IN DADAAB REFUGEE CAMPS

4.1 FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The family was a prominent theme in the four interviews. The participants spoke about the ways in which family members, often their mothers, encouraged them to continue education.



In cases where that was not evident, a lack of family support was offered as one of the reasons why the person dropped out.

Family principles and values bond family members together to meet cultural norms and achieve expected goals. In Africa, relationships with family members are vital as family is the foundational unit and ties members together. Relationships in the family are complex and can be positive and or negative due to variation of the certain ties that bond families together. These are often influenced by the attitude, conditions and the environment one is surviving at a time.

Natasha in the interview mentioned her mum: “she is able to just, gives me hope to go to school every morning at least, she encourages me to push on.” Natasha’s mother is enabling her to continue her studies, providing her the emotional support to keep her learning throughout. This boosts the morale of the child, gaining confidence to strive in learning despite the prevailing conditions,

hence offering her motivation from the head of the family, Natasha’s mother. This learning acquisition through Natasha’s relationship with her mother positively correlates to learning achievement, enabling the participant to continue in her studies. Natasha’s hope comes from her mother, and consequently she gathers courage and strength to learn best to her full potential. Natasha explained during the interview



It is like we have competition everyone wants to be the best so that Mom will be proud of us. – **Natasha**



This statement portrays the nature of connection that exists between Natasha and the other siblings with their mother. As a family, they are observing family norms and values, by every one of them doing what is expected in order to make mother happy, which cultivates a positive relationship between Natasha along with the other siblings to their mother, as well as making the mother feel happy as her children are doing their best in learning with a spirit of healthy competition amongst them. This situation enabled Natasha to struggle to her maximum potential of fulfilling family objectives in performing well and being in school.

The relationship environment that is prevalent in the family of Natasha portrays that the parent appreciates tasks well done by the children, particularly learning, and interest is accorded to progress achieved in school, which equally motivates and gives hope to Natasha. She said: "Every morning, when I go to school, [my mother] gets the water and she cooks the lunch." It shows the support and relations Natasha had with her mother, where the mother covers domestic activities in the absence of the daughter. The mother is engaged in the child's activities in the school, providing support to Natasha to attend her learning and taking up some of the roles often performed by Natasha. The parent is engaged in Natasha's learning, increasing her attendance, concentration and motivation to learn without home pressure in mind.

Family support creates a conducive environment for the learner to meet educational objectives, raising their school



performance and instilling confidence to reach their full potential and to continue their studies.

When Natasha was asked from whom she seeks help when she feels uncomfortable, she insisted, "One person is my mother." Natasha's mother offers appropriate guidance to the child's education direction. The help offered may range from setting appropriate expectations together for the school, advising when necessary, receiving them with positive feelings, role modelling, and addressing them effectively for the purpose of settling issues. This kind of help reinforces the learning of the child, and in this case enabled Natasha to be in school.

Fartun in her interview shared: "Yes, I have parents at home, who are supporting me, my mother...give me less work at home, follow me in school, advise me when I am at home, to learn and to achieve my goals." She was noticeably feeling proud of her mother's outstanding support. It outlines the role the parent plays in the education of Fartun: providing necessary support and engagement in their school activities, which results in improved outcomes. The parent assists her daughter in assigning her very few domestic chores due to her school engagement and activities. The parent also provided advice to the daughter and monitored her studies to settle issues when there are issues with the teachers and to generally assess her learning activities. That motivates the child to feel loved and cared for, helps her to concentrate fully on her learning, raises her performance and reduces chances of dropout. In addition, Fartun mentioned that she has a family who are her mentors, and who guide and support her. She said: "Yes, I have people in the family who [are] learned. They support me...role model for us and advise." The regular support and motivation from family members contributes to learning success of Fartun, enabling her to be in school, and complete her study level satisfactorily.

Halima described why she decided to quit learning: "I am helping my mother to, at least, she is the only bread winner of the family, so, I am helping right now. I work as a maid in another family." Halima decided to contribute to the family income when she realized their vulnerability. Her mother didn't advise her accordingly when she was making the decision to drop out of learning but viewed it as an added contribution to family income

That denied her from continuing her studies and diminished her potential, and she ended up as a child labourer. The mother never had in mind the productivity impacts of her daughter to the family and society when she completes her learning. Halima sacrificed her learning for the immediate well-being of other family members. The mother's relationship with Halima's school activities was not strong: she neither showed great love nor treated her with care as she allowed her to be more vulnerable to violence or abuses, as well as denied her the right to access education. In addition, Halima admitted that her mother contributed to her drop out, claiming that she never provided her the necessary guidance during her decision. She said: "Yes, of course. Because she could have hustle and, at least, she could have encouraged me to complete form 4 because I was almost there but ... she could have encouraged me to continue with the education . I think she has something; she has something to do with my drop out."

The feeling of Halima towards her mother is of great concern. Parents are key facilitators of their children's learning in order to shape their behaviour and generally their future. They play a great role from home to school to mould the child through engagement and social support like encouragement at all levels, both home and school, to inspire the child to become an active learner. The mother has not exercised her parental role in child's education. She regarded the daughter's education as something secondary and valued more the income she contributes to the family. According to Halima, her mother has never followed up on her school life, and totally ignores her learning: "She never follows up my performance.

She don't know if I reached school or if I sit in between school and home." This situation was a blow to the learning of Halima.

She had no support from the mother and her mother had no relationship with her school. It lowered her self-esteem to continue her studies, and so she instead decided to join her mother in family provision at the expense of her learning.

Siham shared: "My father started making noise when I was in form 2 saying I could not continue my studies and he wanted me get married. I got stressed, I was not even settled, I could not continue, I dropped." Siham revealed also that the parents could not help her even during primary education. It was through her own capacity that she pushed to secondary level. Finally, she quit learning due to severe pressure from her parents, particularly her father. She was not supported in her choice to complete her studies due to the nature of relations that existed between the father and Siham.



The father did not involve himself in the learning of his daughter, rather he contributed to her dropout due to the pressure he imposed on her to halt her studies and to get married to a man forcefully.

Siham joyfully said during the interview that she was enjoying school life and wished to achieve her dreams and help her family due to their economic conditions. The father has cut short the dream of his daughter despite her willingness to contribute to their family after completion of her studies.

Siham commented: "I used to do all household chores in the family...because the rest were boys...that is what affected my attendance sometimes." Siham's school attendance was not regular, making her miss some classes due to performing domestic tasks. She was the only girl in a family dominated by boys. Her brothers as well as the parents had not allocated household activities to the boys equally, which affected the learning of the only girl in the family along with the pressure from the parents to quit learning.

4.2 FAMILY EDUCATION



The educational background and experience of parents or family members impacted the educational achievement of the four participants. If the parent is educated, the

involvement in school activities of their children is greater

They provide support in helping children complete school assignments at home, do assessment or check the learning materials and content of the child, and monitor good relationships to teachers. This support will enable learners to concentrate on their studies, improve their learning behaviour, perform and meet expectations. Family members or parents co-educate the children when they have advanced education experience and backgrounds. When Natasha was asked during interview what motivates her, she excitedly said: "We are actually, all of us we are in school. My brother is also in Form 4. And my other siblings, there is one in Form 3, and the rest are in Primary.

When I see how they are working hard, I am also able to just work hard. It is like we have competition." The presence of school-going children in the family of Natasha, some with same level, boosted her morale to continue her learning. Competition existed among the children of the family in order to please their mother, who made efforts to be involved in their education. The learning children in Natasha's family made her engage in extra academic activities when at home as they helped one another in learning, and encouraged her to perform well and stay in school.

Fartun was asked about their family education in the interview and she said courageously: "Yes, I have people in the family who learned... role model for us. They advise and support (me)". Fartun mentioned that some of her uncles are teachers. The educated members of the family inspire her and impact her school attitude positively toward achieving her goals. The uncles involve themselves in her schooling, provide a better learning environment at home, provide necessary learning materials, and instill confidence, which contribute to her academic success.

Halima's mother has no educational experience. As a single mother, she concentrated much more on her children's feeding than schooling. This priority forced her first born to drop out of school due to lack of motivation from her parent and a realization of the unbearable living conditions. Halima surprisingly described how she dropped out during the interview: "My mother is not educated. I am the first born and I dropped out of the school and others are in school, like, at least seven, eight of them, they are schooling, they are learning, some are in high school and others are in primary school."

in primary school.” She continued narrating how her mother was not supportive in her schooling, was not following up her learning and had no relationship with the school of her children: “She don’t know if I reached school or if I sit in between school and home, so, she don’t know.” When the mother was not focused to play her monitoring role of her child’s learning, Halima felt that there was no strong connection between her family and the school. She decided to drop out after missing out on the necessary support and motivation from her mother. The mother was not educated and was not in touch with the school, and therefore could not help the child’s learning at home. Halima got distracted by home tasks, and the mother was not prepared to help her in learning, so finally she took her decision to quit learning.

Finally, Siham mentioned that her parents have no educational background or experience. She said: “Both my parents have not gone to school.” Siham was the only girl in a family dominated by boys. The parents did not support the learning of their only daughter and had a negative attitude toward girls’ education. Boys were favoured over the girl in the family by the parents. Boys were supported much more than the daughter and the girl was assigned more domestic chores in the household. Her parents did not provide an effective learning environment and support. Her school activities were never followed by her parents. She was the only one pushing her learning before the decision to suspend learning. Her parents were not educated and viewed the education of the girl as something unproductive and a waste of resources. They believed she will not complete her education as she must marry as per the expectations of the traditions.

The attitude demonstrated by the parents was not fair and positive.

They never viewed the education of the girl as a human investment that in return can result in development to the family and the society. This attitude resulted in Siham dropping out before she completed her studies, as the parents did not build her confidence or contribute to educational achievement, and instead acted as a block to her chances of success.

4.3 HOUSEHOLD INCOME

In education, household income influences education attainment. In our interviews Natasha commented: “she [mother] is able to buy me uniform because the uniform, you have to buy...maybe few books, exercise books because textbooks are quite expensive. She doesn’t have a work, job...We just depend on food we get...from just the World Food Programme.” The mother of Natasha has tried her best to provide a few learning materials for her daughter despite the prevailing low-income conditions of the family.



Of course, the mother was not working and mostly the family relied on the food aid from World Food Programme.

This has not stopped the mother from supporting and encouraging her children to continue their learning, giving alternative life chances because of learning completion.

Household income impacted Halima's schooling and made her drop out of learning before completion. She said during our interview:

“

I dropped out of school because of poverty because I came from poor background family... I work as a maid in another family...my mom was the only one raising the whole children, and what she was getting was not enough for us.

- Halima

”

The remarks of Halima outline the existence of the extreme income conditions of their family in a single-parent family led by a mother. The mother focused more on home issues than the school life of her daughter. Halima found the situation unbearable and therefore decided to contribute to the household income by engaging in child labour, working for another family at a tender age for their survival at the expense of her education. Halima acknowledged the importance of education to her life during the interview. Her mother did not give proper guidance in her decision to drop learning. She rather welcomed and found an alternative income contribution when her daughter engaged in child labour as another income to return to the family welfare. This example illustrates connections between educational outcomes and household income, where chances of educational attainment are extremely low.

Fartun raised the income level of their family during the interview at several points. She said that it was economically moderate and not too stable, yet her mother and some other family members support her in purchase of learning materials such as books. She said “Yes, I have parents at home, who are supporting me, my mother. She buys books.... Our family is average (economic) stable people. Yes, I have [other] people in the family ...support me economically” The support of the parent and other family members due to the income status of the household enabled her to continue her education with no income challenges. She looked comfortable when she was responding to this question and much appreciated the income support accorded for her educational attainment.

Siham has both parents at home but they decided to marry their daughter, particularly her father, to a man who claimed to be financially stable because he came back from one of the Western countries. Siham uttered these reflections with disappointment during the interview:

“

Family was lacking financial support. Financial issues. My father has been given a lot of money. He was valuing money instead of my education. He wanted to marry somebody from abroad. He was taking advantage of me.

- Siham

”

The father got enticed by the man due to his financial status along with their current economic conditions. He forced his daughter to get married to the man in exchange for financial support. She felt exploited and abused due to their economic backgrounds, which finally contributed to her dropping out.

4.4 GENDERED FAMILY CULTURAL TRADITIONS

The attitude of parents towards girls' education as well as traditions in society influenced the four participants' educational achievement. Parents give preference to male children over female children and believe that education for girls will not have a lasting impact to the family and society.



Traditions expect girls to undertake certain roles at an early age, such as cooking, fetching water and generally performing all domestic chores.

Siham described their family composition during the interview. She mentioned that their family is large and she is the only girl in their household and the rest are boys. According to the traditional expectations of their society, she was assigned all domestic chores in the family. The parents did not assign tasks equally amongst their children. Siham explained how overwhelmed she is in performing domestic tasks: "I was the only girl in the family and I used to do all household chores in the family, yah because the rest were boys and I was the only girl who was doing." These expectations left Siham overworked, taking up all domestic responsibilities and unsupported.

She mentioned that she was not attending the school regularly because she has to meet domestic deadlines with all tasks accomplished. It seemed to us that there are certain punishments if she does not complete her household chores on time and that forced her to skip classes in school. Her brothers were attending school and coming back when food is cooked, water is ready, utensils are clean, and the entire home is made attractive.

She also revealed that the parents were not in support of her education as a girl because of their view and the community belief about female education. She said: "They don't support education, girls education, because they have, they believe even if the girls are educated, they will still be somebody's wife and their work is to give birth to children, and cooking and whatsoever." The kind of perception the parents hold about female education was contrary to that of the daughter.

They believe that girls' education has no value in the society and the family cultural expectation is to finally become a wife, with her main task being caring children and maintaining the home in order.

This attitude and these traditions have contributed to the dropout of Siham. She mentioned that she withdrew from learning and was forced to marry a man she did not want to marry, but she must comply with the plan of her father to get her married to the man he proposed.

Moreover, Halima stated that the parents as well her community do not value female education. They view girls' education as something that does not continue long because she has to get married and will not contribute back to her family, compared to education of the boy child which is perceived as a contribution and development to the family. Halima said during the interview:

“

They don't value it. Because the only thing that, even if you educate a girl, she will eventually get married. And maybe, some other people will benefit from her education, or something like that, but they don't value because they think that the only female, the only work female can do is to, to be in the kitchen, to get married, to give birth, and nothing else.

- Halima

”

This perception and these traditions parents believed have lowered the self-esteem of Halima. She missed emotional support from the parents, which finally resulted in her dropping out. Female education is viewed as a waste of resources and time, eventually helping another family after marriage. This is the major reason why support is not rendered to girls' education. Boys' education is given preference as they mostly remain near the family of the parents and they retain and pass on the name of the family.

Fartun's narratives are different. She mentioned during the interview that her mother had helped to achieve her goals in life. She said:

“

Yes, I have parents at home, who are supporting me, my mother. She buys books...give me less work at home, follow me in school, advise me when I am at home, to learn and to achieve my goals. - **Fartun**

”

Fartun described the attitude of her mother towards her education as positive. The mother wanted her daughter to accomplish her studies and was following up with her school to stand with her. The mother treated Fartun just as a daughter and did not show any sort of preference over other children. She was committed to assisting her daughter for her educational achievement, which enabled Fartun to continue her studies without any interruption.

Natasha's mother had a positive attitude towards education for her children. Natasha said her mother was making her continue her studies and keeping her motivated throughout. She honestly said in an interview: "she is able to just, gives me hope to go to school every morning at least, she encourages me to push on." This statement reflects the support the mother gave to her daughter to attain her education, which increased her chances to completion high school.

4.5 SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS

School teachers have a great role in the learning achievement of children in their schools. Schools that have clear monitoring procedures of students' attendance often experience low absenteeism and reduced dropout.

The system teachers employ positively or negatively affects students.

Teachers who are very strict in attendance cultivate a good relationship with the parents and are always in contact with them in case of issues that need attention. This communication helps the teacher review patterns of attendance and examine if reasons for absences are because of school or home, and resolve issues accordingly with the support of parents.

Siham was not regular in school attendance due excess domestic chores she was assigned along with the attitude of her parents towards her studies as well as traditional expectations. She regretfully said that she did not reveal her problems at home to schoolteachers: "But I did not share the difficulties that I was having at home." In this scenario, the class teacher and school administration did not follow well the attendance of the learner until she took her final decision to drop out and was forced to marry a man. There could have been a positive outcome if teachers had traced well the attendance of the student, contacted her parents, done parental awareness, and guided Siham appropriately to retain her in school. Halima was asked ways the school could have helped her to prevent her dropout and she said optimistically: "I could have advised the class teachers to follow up or at least to trace those who are absent...those who having chronic absenteeism and forward that case to the school administration and... follow those who dropping out of school up to homesteads with the help of community."

As a first born in a family, Halima felt she has a responsibility to contribute to the family due to the low-income status of the family. Her mother did not advise but let her also stay at home even during school days to keep children at home and do household chores. These commitments forced her to be away from school some days and eventually she decided to give up and engage in a house help job to contribute to her family income. In this course of absence, school teachers did not follow up on the whereabouts of the learner. Halima insisted that she could not drop learning if teachers would support and guide her, follow-up and find out her cause of absence and advise her and the parent accordingly.

Fartun has a parent, her mother, and her uncles who are in regular contact with the school teachers. Her attendance was great unless for genuine reasons. Fartun mentioned knowingly that her relationships with the teachers were strong and helpful in achieving her academic goals:

“
Yes, I have relationships with my teachers because...They mostly give me supports to achieve my goals. – Fartun
”

Fartun looked very comfortable due to the contact between her parents and the school, she felt motivated and believes that it is what is enabling her educational achievement. The relationship between teachers and the parents instill confidence in the learner, raises performance and increases chances of completion.

Natasha described vividly the courage of her mother in following up her studies and connecting with the school teachers. Her school attendance was perfect because her mother relieved her from the domestic chores. In addition, she had a good relationship with school teachers, particularly the female teachers, and often sought help when necessary. She boldly said in the interview: "some of the female teachers in the school because whenever I am having an issue in school, and my mother is far, I can just go and seek help from them."

Natasha explained that there are some issues that cannot be shared with a male teacher due to privacy and therefore preferred the female teachers over the males in some sensitive issues. She suggested that there should be more female teachers in the school to help guiding and counselling female students.

5. GIRL CHILD EDUCATION SERVICES IN DADAAB CONTEXTS

In this section, we return to our data and selected literature on education and gender in refugee contexts. We turn to literature as a way of discussing the implications of our research themes and how they relate to existing literature and recent policy statements by organizations, including UNHCR. These discussions explore the question:

How might our research themes:



family relationship



family income



family education



school factors and family gendered cultural traditions

support and potentially further enhance high-profile gender education initiatives run by humanities organizations operating in the Dadaab refugee camp?

The latest UNHCR (2019) report, *Stepping Up*, explores the crises associated with refugee education and measures to overcome educational underachievement. The significance of education is emphasized for human productivity, empowerment, recovery and reconstruction, and consciousness of the diversity of humanity. Chapter Two – “Secondary Education: Lost Futures” – captures the academic transition of refugee students from one level of education to another and the high dropout level before the journey ends. In this chapter, secondary education is connected with greater opportunities as it paves room for higher education and employment. A pipeline-like model of retention underpins these discussions, with the goal to keep as many students (especially from under-represented groups) in secondary school as long as possible.

A number of barriers to secondary education were identified in the report which include: (i) few secondary schools against the large primary population which created a space issue, (ii) the need for trained teachers, (iii) family financial factors, (iv) household chores, (v) forced or early marriage, (vi) traditions, (vii) school distance from home, and (viii) few female teachers. The report outlined that these barriers disadvantage female education more and subject them to exploitation, violence, illegal activities, and finally dropout from learning. Opportunities are limited when education is not well-funded, adversely affecting vulnerable groups.

Continuity of learning provides protection to refugee learners despite their vulnerability. The report recommends provision of maximum support to girls' education.



Giving girls more chances for learning reduces many barriers due to their vulnerability such as gender-based

violence, early marriage and pregnancy, and exploitation.

These supports increase women's chances of school completion and potentially greater earnings in future which benefits them, families and society. Female teachers in school are important; they inspire, comfort and act as role models for female students in the school. In addition, the report outlined the necessity for funding to support families of refugee students to enable them to have better opportunities for educational achievement. In kind cash transfers for families with low economic status who have girls in school could improve learner retention, attendance and participation. Education reduces early or forced marriage and child labour engagement by the female students, particularly in high schools. The right to complete cycles of education for refugee students is emphasized and the report resolves to close the gender gap in education. For this reason, UNHCR suggested policies to increase access to education for refugees with the aim of completion, calling on education partners, both organizations and governments, to support and participate in the concern.

The report reveals primary education enrollment progress and the barriers

surrounding secondary and tertiary education, resulting in an increased dropout rate, particularly for girls. In addition, there is a need for higher education to generate leaders that can make critical decisions. Education increases the voices of the refugees and perpetuates change. That is why inclusive education access for all genders is crucial. Refugee education is viewed as an investment and there is a need for all partners and the society to participate for change to achieve gender parity. This change is possible if the refugees receive an education cycle that is complete, with measures to close the existing gaps. The idea is to prepare refugees through education to attain resilience, transformation, peace and sustainability.

In our study, five key themes emerged linked to education completion or dropout: family relationships, family education, household income, gendered traditions and school-related factors. The last three were similarly mentioned in the UNHCR report. According to the report, family income impacts the learning outcome of refugee students. Refugee families do not have a stable income and this vulnerability caused the parents and their children to make decisions that impact their learning negatively. Students may engage in child labour at a teenage age for survival, and parents may not prevent them. For instance, two participants in this study dropped out of learning due income issues in their respective families. Halima started working as a maid in another family to generate an income to support her family at the expense of her education. Siham was forced by her father to marry a man not of her choice due to the income of their family.

The other two participants, Fartun and Natasha, received income reinforcement from their families to continue their education by purchasing learning materials.

School factors may impact students either way. In our findings from the participant's interviews, we realized that Halima and Siham dropped out of school partly because of school-associated factors. They started not attending school regularly because they were either held up by domestic chores assigned to them by their parents at home or sometimes forced to stay at home because some parents did not value girls' education. When that happened, teachers in their school did not take a step to follow up the whereabouts of these learners and did not mobilize the parents to retain the girls in school.

Although many teachers in Dadaab high schools have some teachers' qualifications, there remain issues with teachers not fulfilling duties and paying little attention to the specific needs of learners, which may be due to reluctance from the class teachers and school administration

According to the girls, they did not share anything with the school teachers, which shows that there were poor relations cultivated. That demotivated the students to reveal their feelings and experiences at home. The UNHCR report clarifies the need for trained teachers in secondary schools as the subjects taught are advanced, and they need to supervise students' behaviour and learning activities. This training motivates students to respect the teachers, share their feelings positively and discuss any other issues affecting their studies.

Gendered cultural traditions existed in the families of Halima and Siham, as observed during our in-depth interviews. Halima's mother did not value the education of her daughter and instead accepted that she work in another family to contribute to family income. Halima regretfully described the views of her mother towards her education as something that does not last long as she will finally end up being a wife, doing cooking, washing and finally rearing children. Siham's parents viewed female education similarly to Halima's mother and therefore her father decided to force her marriage. The father believed that he was doing the right thing for his daughter as well as fulfilling his responsibility of being a parent. Siham was the only daughter in a family dominated by boys and her parents gave preference to the boys over her, which highlights how the gender composition of the family is significant. She was assigned more domestic chores while boys went to school. Both Fartun and Natasha received full support from their parents who reduced home tasks for them for the purpose of their learning.

The education report from UNHCR holds a different view of female education from some participants' parents. It outlines that on the one hand, when education opportunities for girls are limited, their vulnerability to exploitation, pregnancy, gender-based violence, and child labour increases.

On the other hand, education access for girls and completion of education play an important role in their protection, increasing their growth, self-reliance, and empowerment, and acting as a gateway to many other opportunities.



Family relations and family educational backgrounds are two key themes in our study that were not reflected in the UNHCR report. In our findings, family relationships play a crucial role in children's educational achievement. For example, Natasha and Fartun had parents and family members who were supportive. Their parents gave them enough time to learn by not assigning tasks to them during the learning days, and only allocated some domestic chores during weekends or when they were back from school. Their parents were following up their learning activities and had a good relationship with the school. The parents motivated and reinforced their learning. They had no pressure from home activities and hence fully concentrated on their studies and finally completed their studies. On the other hand, Halima and Siham were unlucky and did not receive full support from their parents. They were assigned a lot of domestic roles to complete, and their parents never followed up with their studies. This lack of support demotivated them and caused issues with their school attendance and participation, finally contributing to their dropout before school completion.

Family educational background facilitates learning achievement of the children.



Members in the family who are educated or learning at that moment can support children with assignments at home,

guide them well on school matters, and monitor studies and behaviour patterns of the children both at home and in school.

Educated family members cultivate a connection between children and parents, and between parents and schoolteachers. Similarly, if those learning are school-going children or youth, it creates academic competition among them to make parents happy and proud, as in the case of Natasha who had her brothers and sisters learning with her and helping one another in academics when at home. Fartun had her uncles who are learning at home, and they advised and supported her in learning activities. They also had contact with the school where she was learning. Support and motivation from learned or learning people from their respective families helped both Natasha and Fartun to complete their high school satisfactorily. In contrast, Siham and Halima's parents were not educated. They did not monitor their studies of their children, had no contact with their school, and could not support their learning at home because they did not go to school. They paid little attention to the learning of their children and rather assigned them more domestic chores along with other ways to withdraw them from school, which demotivated the girls who dropped out of learning. Siham was forced to marry a man and Halima worked as a maid. The parents did not realize that they are subjecting their daughters to child labour and gender-based violence and withdrawing them from learning where they could realize growth, productivity, self-empowerment and self-reliance.

In the Dadaab refugee camps, there are some gender initiative policies that are in place in the areas of



In the education field, sanitary kits are provided to school-going girls, both primary and secondary learners, to keep the girls in school in order not to miss classes during the menstrual cycles and for better hygiene practices. Taking away sugar or milk was once in place, measured based on attendance of the girl on school days. The objective was to regulate attendance, retain girls and increase their enrollment.

Scholarships are provided for the best performing girls to go to school out of the refugee camps to learn with the Kenyan students in other parts of the country and come back when school is closed to their homes with the support of agencies in charge of the project. Boys and girls have different grades and marks for admission in secondary schools. The pass mark for girls is lower than that of boys to absorb more girls in schools. Similarly, grades for higher education scholarships differ based on gender. Scholarships can be within the host country or outside to Western nations. This is an affirmative action plan introduced in the refugee camps by scholarship providers and UNHCR. A certain percentage is exclusively reserved for girls. The idea behind it is to attract more girls and women into the educational opportunities. Remedial classes are provided during weekends for girls in school to build their understanding and catch up with the boys as well.

Capacity-building and participation policies are introduced in the camps, which organizations implementing projects need to integrate in their policies and operations. Girls and women are often trained on issues connected to their lives like rights, gender, and cultural issues such as female genital mutilation. The gender proportion of trainees is assured to be equal and trainees' participation is facilitated well. Girls and women support clubs and groups are formed for advocacy around gender-related issues, to pass messages to the community for change and to get empowered.

Female students and women in the community are sometimes taken for training and exposure out of the refugee camps, both within the host country and in the outside world, to interact with different people for the purpose of gaining knowledge and experience on how other people do things related to their lives.

Employment opportunity policies must comply with a gender perspective. Most humanitarian organizations operating in the Dadaab camps observe recruitment with a gender lens. A portion of the opportunities are given to females. Some posts are exclusively reserved for females to apply. Affirmative action is also evident with recruitment results, sorted out based on gender, with the top of each category declared as successful rather than a single ranking system performance. For infrastructure, girls in school have different latrines. Their latrines have a privacy structure surrounding them meant to provide a favourable environment for them to use latrines for their needs and to reduce fear of being seen by boys during access. Leadership and representation are a common practice in formal community and institution structures.

The gender ratio of leadership in the refugee community is balanced, starting from blocks, sections and overall camp management. Student leadership based on gender is practised from the class level, to departments, to overall students' leadership in the school.

Most organizations in the Dadaab refugee camps are committed to gender issues with the goal to attain equality

Based on their project design, some confront gender-based violence, protection and discrimination issues, awareness and community participation, or education.

One organization that supports girl child education in Dadaab refugee camps in partnership with other implementing agencies is

KEEP = Kenya Equity Education Project

As the name reflects, the organization is committed to inclusive education to achieve gender equality. KEEP is in partnership with Windle International Kenya that implements a secondary education program in Dadaab refugee camps and the World University Service of Canada. The Department for International Development under the Girls' Education Challenge funds this program from the United Kingdom. The project focuses on refugee communities in Dadaab and host communities in Dadaab and Wajir County. The program also exists in Turkana County.

KEEP initiated construction of classes and latrines to reduce pressure of classroom shortages and latrines. They also distributed lanterns, conducted capacity-building for clubs in the school, and introduced cash transfers for vulnerable girls to support their learning. However, the beneficiaries are few compared to the large number of needy girls. They also hire remedial teachers and train them on gender perspectives in the learning environment to increase access to learning and to achieve quality education. Scholarships were provided to the best-performing girls and remedial teaching for low-performing girls to increase girls' enrolment, retention, protection, transition, performance and sustainability.

The performance of KEEP in supporting girls' education in Dadaab refugee camps is incredible. The transition from primary to secondary is getting better. However, the retention of the girls in secondary schools in the camps is still a concern and therefore requires strategies to carry forward the commitment and improve areas of attention with suitable action. The number is still reducing as students advance through the various grades of the high school. To compare our findings on factors that lead to dropout with measures and outcomes of KEEP, there is a need for more commitment to achieve gender parity. Family income was a factor facilitating dropout and KEEP introduced cash transfers for a very small number of girls in secondary schools to support them. The idea is positive and there is a need to increase the number of beneficiaries and the rate reimbursed. Family gendered traditions affect the educational achievement of girls. In our study, we came to know that some of the girls drop out of school due to preference given to boys over them, while others are likely to quit learning as their parents do not treat their education as valuable.

KEEP tried to change the attitude and traditions affecting girls' education by sensitizing the community but there is a need for further efforts to reverse the phenomenon.

The school may also contribute to dropout. The participants in this study who dropped out mentioned that teachers did not follow up with them at home to find out the problem. They did not supervise well the attendance of the learners.

KEEP in this case trains teachers on gender equality as well as recruits remedial and counselling teachers to support girls' education. Despite these efforts, dropout continues. There is a need to ensure accountability on female attendance and to issue regular follow-up reports. Teachers must contact the parents of the girl when absence is noted earlier before the student or parents make a tough decision. The way remedial lessons are allocated in secondary schools is not suitable and is very different from primary school remedial lessons, which take place during weekends. The number of girls identified for remedial lessons is few. A review of strategies to approach girls' education is essential.

Family relations and family education were two key findings that can either contribute to the success of girls or facilitate their dropout. So far, these factors are not reflected in KEEP approaches to female education in the refugee camps and in host communities. Based on this study's interviews, two girls were able to perform well, push their studies and gain courage from their family members. The other two could not continue their learning and finally dropped out from school after failing to get necessary support from members of their families. They felt isolated and experienced an unsupportive environment. KEEP services did not reach these girls to support their education completion. Family relationships are essential as they build trust, collaborations, mutual concern, honesty and a spirit of unity. The success of the child depends on the nature of support accorded to the interest and needs of the child. Similarly, the future of the child depends on family education background.

Two of the participants in this study were able to complete their studies in high school successfully because they achieved full support from family members who are educated, giving them academic advice and support at home, following up with their studies and attendance, and staying in contact with the school teachers, unlike the other two participants who had no support because they had did not have family members who were educated.



Refugee students have the right to education like any other child in the world. Increasing investment in their learning and providing

favourable opportunities and a favourable environment can foster change in their educational achievement, particularly for girls. Education changes the lives of refugees, particularly girls, empowering them to be independent and to achieve socio-economic inclusion, a good reason to contribute in the education of refugee girls.

6. CONCLUSION

School dropout is a complex issue and arriving at a single solution is challenging as the specifics and contexts vary. Our study's interest is in female dropout in secondary education in the Dadaab refugee camps. It was motivated to find out some of the determinants and arrive at more efficient pathways to overcome these issues and to promote girls' education. Addressing barriers and meeting the education needs of disadvantaged groups to help them access high-quality and equitable education by focusing on the targets and reviewing policies is essential to achieve transformation and education for all regardless of diversity characteristics (UNESCO 2016: 7). It means increasing participation to achieve gender parity where no one is left behind and setting up educational policies that meet the needs of all people. Our goal is to seed lifelong learning that follows the principles of quality, equity and inclusiveness. Refugee education takes place under emergency contexts with people who are traumatized due to past experiences and therefore need strategies for recovery.



Education plays a crucial role in protecting girls and women who are more vulnerable to risks; it offers the hope of acquiring knowledge and skills that will achieve a future that is sustainable. This potential calls for educational plans that reduce risks and promote social cohesion and resilience.

The commitments of agencies implementing education projects in refugee contexts should be recognized. However, education in the Dadaab camps needs to be taken a step further. We need strong measures for action to mitigate educational challenges and to adopt working strategies to achieve progress in female education. Reducing dropout inequality is fundamental.

Policies should be consistent with the needs of the target groups and should address barriers effectively that could deprive women and other marginalized groups from learning opportunities.



The barriers constitute social, cultural, environmental and economic factors and the approach to address each barrier varies from another. Therefore, the system of education and approaches should be relevant in eliminating biases and discrimination based on gender, and should put forward practices that are gender-sensitive, which has a positive learning impact for all.

This study was guided by a series of questions: What enables women to continue and be successful at school in Dadaab? What are some of the obstacles and barriers that women face in schools in Dadaab? What might be changed to bring about greater gender equality? Our interviews with four women (two in school and two that have dropped out) explored a series of sub-questions: In what level were you when you dropped out of school?

What factors do you think contributed to this decision? Did your family's household income status contribute? What is the education level of your parents or guardian? How is the attitude of your parents and community toward girls' education? How is your parent or guardian involved in your school life/issues? From whom do you often seek help during challenges? How would you describe your relationship with the schoolteachers/administration and other students? What supported you to continue your studies or what could have prevented you from dropping out?

We explore the findings in this study based on the research questions, particularly what enables the participants to continue their studies or what is contributing to them dropping out of high school. Our analysis of two female students who continued with education and two that dropped education revealed a series of important factors influencing dropout. To begin, we realized that positive family relationships impact the study of the learners, increasing motivation and performance, retention and completion. Family relationships may also contribute toward absenteeism, poor concentration, demotivation and finally dropout.

It was noted that parents and the family fundamentally influence the life of the children, particularly their learning.

The two participants who dropped out of learning did not receive close attention and support from their parents towards their education. This contributed to their dropout.

Family income has an impact in two ways. On the one hand, participants who had a family with a better income received support to meet their learning needs, such as the purchase of learning materials. That motivated the participants to continue and complete their studies. These material dimensions cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, participants who belonged to families of low income who could not afford to purchase materials for learning became demotivated to attend classes regularly and finally dropped out. Imagine a large household size along with a low income level. The fiscal demands of meeting the family's needs caused young women to engage in child labour and forced marriage.



Low-income status significantly increased the risk of or caused their dropout. Short-term family economics are fundamentally important.

Moreover, family gendered traditions were also connected to school dropout based on family attitude towards female education. Families of participants who dropped out of learning gave preference to boys' education, allocating few domestic tasks to male children and prioritizing their education over those of girls. Girls were assigned more domestic responsibilities for the family including caring for the well-being of boys which caused them to be absent themselves from school to ensure task completion. Girls were viewed as people whose education does not last long and is not as fruitful, since it will only contribute to other families who will get them when they are married, unlike boys who maintain the family lineage

Family education and school-related factors are scenarios that can either increase the continuation of learning, or encourage or force dropout. We found that participants who had some family members or close relatives who were educated were able to continue their studies. They felt motivated, and their parents assisted in academic assignments at home and offered relevant advice. The two students in question had strong relations to the school, resulting in increased performance, better relations with the teachers, retention and finally learning completion

Typically, parents who value education and involve themselves in the learning of their children will receive the longer term benefits, contrary to participants who had no family education background.

They felt demotivated, which contributed to low performance, irregular school attendance and eventually dropout from learning.

Some of our discussions also related to the school. The importance of teachers following up on learners' attendance, particularly those who dropped out was significant. They are learners who are facing significant challenges at the family level due to income, gender and other issues. Teachers and school administrators need to engage learners positively, motivate them, and be concerned about their attendance. They need follow-up on their needs in order to settle some of the frustrating issues learners experience at their respective homes and help them make informed decisions.

Unmotivated students fall behind in attendance, which finally results in dropping out, suggesting that dropping out is a gradual process and the signs are detectable in advance.

Therefore, teachers should monitor students' attendance consistently with the support of parents before the situation gets worse. Teachers' commitment to children's education improves parent teacher relationships and learning outcomes, as well as empowers and motivates students to make informed decisions and to respond to situational challenges. Moreover, schools need to be sensitive to the importance of parents and seek to connect with parents, paying close attention to those who do not have school education themselves. They also need to run special sessions for girls and highlight some of the reasons for dropping out and the overwhelming evidence of the longer-term positive effects of staying in schools.

Following qualitative empirical methods, our study was based on four interviews.

It is erroneous to extrapolate these data to a larger sample size. This is a case study of four students. It offers insight into these students' experiences. In this sense, this study outcome can be treated as reliable and valid.

We hope that it offers an opportunity for those involved in educational policy and practice to reflect on the experiences of the four students that we have outlined.

However, the study captured a single sample of the nine secondary schools under the humanitarian agencies. The refugee population is associated with greater mobility: formal voluntary repatriation, relocation, resettlement and informal cases of movement which are not on record. We therefore recommend future research to reflect learners' movement over a period of time (a longitudinal study), and to cover a large number of schools and participants in order to further improve the situation and provide better insights that yield change in the gender education gap. In terms of future research, we recommend more studies to explore the following questions: How often are education policies and practices reviewed? What do these policies do in schools? How do teachers explain the reasons for dropout? Do school parents play a role in dropout? Answers to these questions will expand the study and give new insights.

This continuous support empowers the female students in secondary schools in the camps and will enable them to participate freely various available opportunities and become self-reliant, powerful leaders and generally significant people in the society in future. Unlocking the gender barriers for female refugee learners in high school and building better bridges to quality education and inclusion is vital to enforce the right to education right.



Education is essential in an emergency refuge context for resilience, recovery and reconstruction.

It is therefore important to adapt strategies and practices that will combat the gender gap in education and promote inclusion and the participation of female students in education. Education programs need to be reviewed and services should be responding to the needs of the beneficiaries effectively. Involvement of all partners and the community itself can reduce the gaps identified and step forward in education access and completion for all learners irrespective of gender.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study have implications for practice, policy and research.



Dropout of girls in Dadaab refugee camps particularly at secondary education shapes dreams and future development, creating low

life chances in employment opportunities, leadership and political progress, and social life participation. It is also associated with depression, isolation, gender-based violence, child labour and many other risks,

as our review of the literature suggests. The impact does not only fall to girls as individuals but also families and the community at large. Based on factors on the ground, there is a need to establish sound policies that can translate the experiences refugee girls in secondary education face.

We recommend a review of gender policies in education in Dadaab with respect to gender inclusion, social justice, protection, and the mobilization of resources to meet the needs of marginalized groups.

Our study demonstrates the importance of listening to women who have continued with education and also those who have not.




We suggest that policy discussions could take place at the jurisdictional and also school levels.

It should include parents and children, seeking ways of engaging parents who did not attend school themselves. These discussions could be achievable with accountability and collective responsibility from education implementing organizations, community leaders and associations, parents, and teachers to overcome the gap and attain gender equality in education with the creation of a gender-responsive culture and environment at home and school.

In terms of schooling, learning should not only be attending a classroom but also recognizing that the nature of the learning environment is crucial. Institutions should further acknowledge the gender inequalities existing within the school community. There is a need to work towards breaking gender barriers common in the camps as evidenced in this study and foster positive gender relations to overcome inequality and stereotypes. Gender inclusion should become a topic of discussion in classrooms and continue to be a central theme of community liaisons. Given the significance of family, we need to seek ways of talking about the cultural politics of family life in Dadaab, recognizing short and long-term benefits of supporting girls' education.

Reviewing learners' treatment, language of instruction and methodologies, organization of teachers' responsibilities over the learners in school and outside, and collaboration with all players, particularly parents, is critical.

Administrators and teachers in secondary schools in the refugee camps should adopt practices that are gender-focused and responsive to deal with the diverse needs of all learners effectively regardless of gender. Students should be equipped with relevant knowledge, skills, and attitude for an effective response.



This reinforcement can perpetuate change and eventually offer significant solutions in combating inequality and will enable girls to complete the full cycle of secondary education without any disruptions.

In the case of the two students that we interviewed, their dropout was gradual, preceded by declining attendance. When students start to be absent from school, it is important for the school to reach out to parents and children. There need to be ways of recognizing and swiftly responding to children at risk. In addition, gender awareness is crucial to attain inclusive education to provide rights protection to education accessibility for all persons.

There are a number of NGOs that have different programs directed toward gender equality. The organization implementing the secondary education program and girl child education should shoulder the responsibility to develop strategies for equitable refugee education.

There is a need to arrive at a suitable solution to address the expanding gender gap in education, combat the barriers, and draw from experiences to increase learning opportunities for girls.

UNHCR as the lead agency for refugee issues as well as education project partners should continue to commit to developing supportive measures to ensure no one is left behind to align with the Education for All mantra. Mobilizing financial resources to provide incentive support will enable girls to continue with education or resume studies for those once interrupted, which should be encouraged. Providing more learning materials in the school and addressing the teaching staff gap by hiring more female teachers can improve access and learning outcomes. These initiatives require the participation of the community in planning and decision-making to enhance meaningful investment in refugee education and respond to challenges collectively.

Our study highlights the significance of family and school in females learning at the secondary level. We recommend further review and commitment of refugee education policies and practices particularly in high school in line with the key themes in this study: family income, family education, family relationship, school-related factors and family gendered traditions. The goal is to achieve an equitable learning environment that is rights-based, secure and inclusive through community ownership and partnership with the community as an active player.

Based on our findings, along with the UNHCR report and KEEP efforts on girl child education, we recommend the following strategies to promote female secondary education in Dadaab:



Introduce in-kind cash to support all families with girls in the school to curb dropout and counteract the high cost of study materials.



Conduct mass sensitization in the community toward the significance of girls' education and girls' contributions to their families and society.



Involve parents in the learning activities of their girls in school to keep in contact with them and strengthen the relationships.



Set up measures to monitor students' attendance involving regular follow-up by the teachers.



Employ more female teachers in schools, assign female teachers to attend issues of female learners in the school, and review how remedial lessons are allocated in the school system to create opportunities and an environment for girls that is gender-sensitive, allowing them to make smart choices about their education.



Establish peer mentoring partnerships in which high school students act as mentors for primary school students during the transition years to motivate the incoming students.



Involve female learners in setting policy in programs that support their educational achievement to contribute toward informed decisions about their lives and studies.



Develop partnerships with educated family members of girls in school to play a crucial role in inspiring girls to continue education and intervening to prevent dropout.

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