

# What Impedes Completion of the Education Cycle for the Boy Child in Informal Settlements in Nairobi County?

Wangui Lydia Chege

PHD Student: St.Paul's University Limuru, Kenya

**Abstract:** *This paper sought to assess various causes of boy child dropout from school in the informal settlements in Nairobi County taking a case study of Baba Dogo area located in the eastern suburbs of the capital city. Secondary data used was obtained from published demographic trends from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and sessional papers and research work. There is a serious information gap on boy child dropout as a greater emphasis post Beijing (1985) has been on the girl child. Kenya, a patriarchal society seem to have taken it literally that the male child is born able to skirt his way round life and as a male he has no challenges needing any intervention. The findings from this research provide evidence on the increasing rate of the boy-child dropout from formal schooling within the informal settlement. This is due to a hidden burden of responsibility. Most households in the informal settlements seem headed by female heads but there is often a male child benefactor of the household. The male child member of the household find themselves compelled to get into casual/cheap employment to subsidize the family needs which leads to their eventual dropout from school. This study concludes that the extreme focus on the girl-child and partial consideration of the boy-child is weakening our society. There is need to pay attention to gender equality and to provide equity to all children; in the education sector especially within the informal settlements, arid and semi-arid areas in order to curb this unsightly occurrence of school dropouts for the boy-child. The vulnerabilities of the boy-child in the informal settlements need to be discussed and addressed.*

**Keywords:** Boy-child, Education, informal-settlements, policy, equity

## Abbreviations

ECCDE Early Childhood Care and Development  
FPE Free primary education  
FDSE Free Day Secondary Education  
EMIS Education Monitoring Information System  
KESSP Kenya Education sector support program

## 1. Introduction

Education is said to be the best gift to a child. It is not only personal, cannot be stolen but definitely it is likely to alter one's life to the best forever. Knowledge and education has increasingly become the key to a gainful and worthwhile future. Education is considered a backbone to development whether self or communal. Given this transformational ability of education in changing lives to the better, it is imperative that greater and concerted effort is sought to ensure that children within the informal settlements in Nairobi county access schooling opportunity, are retained in school and they actually complete the school cycle as a poverty-net escape strategy.

The school cycle as used in this paper refer to education access right from ECCDE, primary 1 to 8, secondary education and at the very least 2 years of vocational training. The school cycle begins at the age of 3 years and is expected to be completed at around age 20-21. This is an age at which one has already acquired a national identity card ( at 18 years in Kenya) and hence is eligible for work as per the employment act of 2007.

In 2003, the Government of Kenya, following a 2002 election campaign pledge, introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in order to universalize access to primary education and increase educational attainment in the

country (Oketch & Ngware, 2012). The positive reception of the free primary policy was followed later with the Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) policy in 2008, aimed at increased transition rate, accelerating enrollment into secondary and improving the quality of school graduates seeking employment even without further training. This approach to education was also viewed as a national strategy of addressing many ills that befall youth out of school such as gangsters' life, early sex debut, drug and substance abuse, child marriages and child labour among others.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

School drop-out rates are high in the informal settlements in Nairobi County. Ministry of Education data system, EMIS in 2006, indicated that up to 59.9 % of school age children in Nairobi informal settlements are not enrolled in school (MOE, 2006) "The number of boys who sat in the inaugural FPE Standard Eight class dropped to 247, 500 from 453, 300, while only 214, 100 completed secondary education compared with 422, 000 who enrolled" (The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA, 2008)

Figures drawn from EMIS imply that there is a challenge in access, retention and transition in education for youth in the informal settlements in Nairobi. This paper attempts to weigh into the causes of school dropout among the boy-child in the informal settlements in Nairobi County. The boy-

child is selected owing to it remaining a phenomenon as very little research has been carried out in this sex group relating to education and slum life.

Many documented evidence has indicated that most households in the informal settlements are headed by female heads but a deeper interrogation reveals that the actual head of the household and the benefactor is a male elder child either living in the informal settlements or in the immediate neighborhoods. (Wangui, 2012)

Wangui, (2012) further noted that patriarchal values of the Kenyan society were still very much in existence in the informal settlements. This is after research revealed that 67% of the households randomly sampled were headed by a male while only 33% were headed by a female on daily basis. These female were either single mothers or firstborns in their home with extremely young brothers. The female head of households were often married to very old men who assisted with the discipline of the household 'wife's' household..

### 3. Theoretical Model

This study is based on the transactional model of development by Arnold Sameroff. The model based on how children and context shape each other. We learn based on our surroundings, history, and cultural artifacts the interplay of nature and nature is used in explaining either negative or positive outcomes in a child. Someroff believed that development outcomes are a function of neither the individual nor the context alone but the interplay between the child's personality traits as well as family experiences, economic, social and community disposition. This he referred to as 'proformal influences'. This theory provides review of effects of neighborhoods residence on an adolescent well-being. The Transactional Model conceptualizes development as a function of bi-directional and reciprocal exchanges between individual and context over time. It also holds that the individual and context (whether parents, or some other aspect of the environment) are not static entities, but dynamically changing each other over time.

### 4. Literature Review

Literature reviewed indicates multifaceted factors for male child drop- out from school. Some of the factors include but not limited to;

- Home factors
- Neighbourhood factors
- Stereotypes on boys behavior problems
- School factors
- Environmental Factors
- Policy factors

#### 4.1 Home Factors

Characteristics of household in the informal settlements show a positive and significant correlation between the level of formal education of heads of households and children access to education. Household characteristics are important

determinants of schooling decisions and outcomes (Dryden-Peterson Sarah, 2011). The higher the academic qualification the head of household has the more authority they can exercise and also the more motivating they will be for the children in the households to acquire education.

Though this is an almost truth that is hard to dispute, it is very biased, within the informal settlements men are heads of households by responsibility of paying rent and seeking for wages to keep the family going. This means the male is more often than not absent to give guidance or articulate his will in the household. The female becomes the de-facto leader and owing to the women empowerment and heightened awareness of the vulnerability of the girl-child, the girl child is encouraged to read hard and escape poverty. To the extremes abandoned wives and single mothers turn to their sons and either coerces them to take up some family responsibility or actually transfer responsibility to the male child without realizing it. The boy-child undertakes some "innocent menial jobs" over the weekend instead of idling. The few hundred shillings he brings to the household seem to ease up life and he gets into routine of providing and finally he falls off school. These socio-economic factors have a higher contribution to these boy-child dropouts.

To illustrate this situation a study by Oketch & Ngware found out about 40 percent of the 15-17 year old adolescent males in the slums were attending school compared with 74 percent of male adolescents aged 15-17 in Kenya and 89 percent in the entire Nairobi city(2012)

#### 4.2 Neighbourhood factors

Girl child education within the informal settlements has been preserve of projects (Fatuma c. et al 2014). While female's mentors and role models are sought, whether from the settlement or without, the few male teachers within the variety of schools in the settlement are laid back and offer very little direct support for the male child. Due to policies focus, school administration has a conscious support for the girl-child emphasis. More often NGOs and any other person seeking to improve life for persons in the informal settlements their first interest is the empowerment of the girl-child.

#### 4.3 Stereotypes on boys behavior problems

In Kenya there are 11 recorded children correctional facilities. Nine out the eleven scattered all the way from Shimo la Tewa in Mtwapa to Kakamega in the western region are for boys (source Ministry of labour and social development). This means there are only two centers left to handle the girl child with behavior problems or in need of care. It is a stereotype that the boy child has more behavior problem and hence the male child offender is easily committed to any of the eleven correctional facilities while it will take longer to have the girl child committed.

This stereotype with harsh responses meted out on the boy child by parents, (sometimes out of their own inadequacies), teachers, neighbours and the law enforcers such as police; accelerates the boy child drop out outcomes. Within the household there is an unspoken agreement that the boys

were not as vulnerable as they girls would be. The girls; it is often feared if left idle they might fall pregnant. This meant that there was no follow up for the boy child right from home to school; this has left a loophole for idling and running away from school and finally being caught up in crime and getting committed by the state as a child offender. Some of these boys run away from home for various reasons including mother engaging in prostitution, sister getting married to an older man who now comes into the household to represent the patriarchy role and the boy cannot fight back (population council, 2008)

A substantial proportion of teenagers leave their parental households at tender ages, with male children having a higher probability to do so more than the girls. In the informal settlements in Nairobi County, such occurrences expose the male child to the risk of indulging in indecent behavior such as getting involved in having numerous sex partners, drug, and substance abuse just to mention a few.

#### 4.4 School factors

There are more non-formal schools than public schools in the informal settlement. These schools are neither welcoming nor motivating to learners and their proximity to a lot of other activities does not help in keeping the boy child in school. The public schools are far apart and the children have to cover long distances for example the distance between Kasarani primary and Baba Dogo primary and MM Chandaria primary for the vast lucky summer area, Ngomongo and Kiamaiko, Korogocho area is really far with no proper roads. The population is extremely high with a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:80 (Observational). This means that the child doesn't enjoy individual teacher attention and any child experiencing difficulties is unknowingly kicked out by the system that perceives him as a rebel. This is a situation that befalls the male child more often than the girl child as girls are able to evoke sympathy and are easy in sharing their issues.



(An informal school-sourced from Mathare Demographic Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> 2014)

Most of the non-formal schools have donors who are keener on sponsoring the female child. (Fatuma C. et al, 2014). The greater focus on the girl child has led to insufficient data on number of boys dropouts as compared to the volumes of studies and policy guidelines in favour of girl child education. This may imply that causes of the boy-child school dropouts are sort of obscure. The school may play right into an already ripe idea and accelerate dropout. The boy child may carry with himself the patriarch figure and is hence likely to face a lot of challenges within the school and outside the school. In the non-formal schools where some fee is levied, he may opt for siblings to have fees paid first and hence as such lack of school fees leads to him falling off school. The male child may fail to meet examination pass marks and this may make him feel embarrassed especially when teachers relate his inadequate performance to his worn-out uniform, sleeping habits in class, failure to complete assignments among other

challenges that could be emanating from home factors. (Oketch m. et al, 2012)

The teacher factor is a key subset within the school environment. According to Ngware et al (2013) teacher characteristics is considered essential to improving learning outcomes. Most of the teachers in the non-formal schools are not professionally trained. This was a whopping 59% (Ngware et al, 2013) These teachers also did not have a lot of experience as this job was treated as another temporary employment that could be changes any time something better came up. Common in both public and non-formal schools was chronic absenteeism of teachers. This factors combined demotivated school attendance for learners but greatly affecting the boy child who does not enjoy any concerted efforts to remain in school and who is easily lured into the world of cheap labour.

#### 4.5 Environmental factors

The male child is likely to suffer discrimination at home as most of the advocacy work reaching the community has emphasis on education for the girl-child. Cheap labor opportunities in the slum neighborhoods or within the slums lure the boy child out of school with a very short lived vision of escaping immediate hunger. The boy child may also seek to create more income for the household to either subsidize the parents' income or to cater for the needs of the other siblings. The boys find other boys "manning up" and doing the same for their different households. As such instead of facing a deterrent situation there is easy transition into a provider than one being provided for.

#### 4.6 Policy factors

These are education strategies and guidelines developed by the government of Kenya to control and direct education in the country. Education operation and administration is affected by a number of policies formulated by different government institutions and agencies and authorized by the ministry of education.

#### 4.7 Gender policy in education (2007 revised in 2015)

For a long time in Kenya and indeed in Africa, the girl-child and the female gender in general was considered to be a weaker sex to their male counterpart. As a result of this misconception, most communities failed to recognize the importance of educating the girl child. Most researchers carried out studies that indicated that poverty would never leave our society until the education of the girl-child is given prime importance.

The gender policy in education was meant to provide equal opportunity of access to education for both boys and girls. This campaign gained momentum with almost all agencies involved forgetting to champion gender equality and equity, they rather dwelt so much on girl-child education. In the case of informal settlements in Nairobi, a lot of emphasis has been put on the welfare of the female child due to the vulnerability associated with her. By implication, the boy child has been assumed by care takers which have significantly contributed to dropping out of school.

#### Non-formal education policy

Non-formal education is a form of teaching and learning which is organized to take place outside the official education system. The education policy regulating this form of education in Kenya was established in 2008. The policy was meant to address leaning requirements of people in Kenya irrespective of their age.

The first class enrolled 161, 231 pupils across the county but 20% of the centers were in slum areas within Nairobi county. Since informal education receives support from the central government, emphasis is put on the learning need of the girl-child, the boy-child seem to cease in the mind of many and therefore neglected (Warrington & Kiragu, 2012).

Further still, most of the centers are run by Non-governmental organizations which spearhead fight against retrogressive cultures such as female genital mutilation. Therefore, the girl-child is given special treatment in this case and the boy-child is unknowingly ignored. Once the child is not closely observed, his behaviour goes out of hand in the long run leading to dropping out of school at a tender age.

#### KESSP 2005-2010

This describes strategic plan for infrastructure development of school in Kenya among other 22 key areas of focus in education in Kenya. Among the critical issues meant to be addressed were renovation of primary schools, improvement of physical facilities and increasing the number of schools in marginalized areas and low-income areas in urban centers. The implementation of this strategic plan has been partial.

Baba Dogo area has not experienced any increase in the number of public schools. The population pressure on the few schools available in this region has promoted the rate of school dropout among the boys who are susceptible to negative social influence. Partial implementation of KESSP strategic plan has contributed to dropout among the male children living in informal settlement as it also had no single target for the boy child.

### 5. Discussion

The historical demographic trend in the education of both boys and girls in Kenya informal settlement and Arid and Semi-Arid areas as described by Oketch & Ngware gives special insight on the comparative distribution of school enrolment at various levels. The education cycle for the girls begins with high enrolment at the basic level but begin to diminish into secondary level. This scenario paints a favorites belief on transition rate for the boys from primary to secondary the true picture is that most boys drop out of school at tender age and it's only those that survive class eight that succeed to join secondary school and finally acquire some college education.

Girl's education especially in the informal settlement in Nairobi County has been a preserve of project. Male teachers are laid back and few school administration consciously support for girls education. There is evidence that in informal settlement in Nairobi County that most parents and teachers have a bias for girl child when it came to school involvement. KESSP 1 (2005 – 2010) as a result of sessional paper 1 of 2005 has gender equity and equality as a key driver of enhancing education for betterment of society as well as its product of gender in education policy 2007, revised in 2015. Marginalization of the boy child especially those within the pockets of poverty; including slums is a big anomaly that continues to pose a threat to National Cohesion and integration, National Security, youth empowerment and wealth creation. There isn't enough data on number of boys dropout of schools as compared to studies carried out for the girl-child and school drop-out.

This means that causes of boys dropout is sort-of not clear and hence is not in the consciousness of our society. The

boy-child easily accesses cheaper labour opportunities; thought to be an escape from poverty or creating income either to subsidize their parent's low income or to cater for siblings need (Bradley, 1995).

## 6. Findings

Beating by teachers, parents disinterest and policy bias accelerated drop – out rate of boys within the informal settlements of Baba Ndogo. The summary of school enrollment in different types of schools in informal settlement in Nairobi is presented in the table below.

School type	No	Population	Boys	Girls
Public	203	205, 450	101, 259	104, 191
Private	360	33, 420	16, 868	16, 552
Non-formal Primary	800	131, 138	64, 443	66, 695
	1363	370, 008	182, 570	187, 438

(Ngware M.et al, 2013)

There is approximately equal number of boys and girls been enrolled in school. However, the total number of enrollment is higher in girls by 4, 868 which translates to 1.3 per cent of the total number of enrollments. Public schools register that highest population followed by non-formal schools while a private school takes the third position.

The rate of school dropout between the boys and girls in the informal settlement is significantly different. When the transition rate for both gender is measured at a given interval, such as class eight it is observed that fewer boys are enrolled in the subsequent levels. Further interrogation in this phenomenon reveals that most of the school dropouts are involved in cheap labour such as managing solid waste in the estates, hawking, selling in open air market as others work as factory casuals.

There was a direct relationship between the rates of school dropout among the boys below fourteen years of age and the home environment (Somerset, 2009). Homes that did not have a father registered the highest number of male children dropping out of school. Notably, most of this group of children went in pursuit of employment in order to support their mothers.

In cases where both parents were in the household, children who dropped out of school blamed the teachers of being uncaring and beating them. This observation seemed to suggest that there could be a certain level of truth in the traditional stereotype about the boy-child behaviour. However, the evidence in the current academic literature such as the work done (Chege & Sifuna, 2006) suggests that there is a general neglect of the male child. The feeling of being unwanted and uncared for has made the boy-child susceptible to the temptation to seek identity elsewhere. This is further deepened by the disinterest of their parents in the academic affairs of their sons.

The other factor contributing to high number of male child dropout from schools in informal settlement is policy bias.

Some of the vulnerable children need to find school as a place of solace. The gender policy in education developed in Kenya has put a lot of emphasis on the girl child to the extent that the boy child feel left out. The feeling may not be directly articulated in a formal way but the manner in which the child is treated may compel them to feel looked down upon. The inferiority complex demotivates the one who feel neglected by the regulation or guideline in operation.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper sought to fill the information gap that exists in the current literature in the development of boy- child education. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the African society and other civilizations began to focus on education of the girl child. This is a good turn of events that has seen these societies transform and liberate themselves from poverty. However, this paradigm shift in focus has completely changed the course of history in the recent past especially in low income areas in the country. Major NGOs and well-wishers dedicated their time, resources and personnel in supporting the girl child in marginalized areas such as informal settlement areas in urban centers and Arid and semi-Arid areas(Somerset, 2009).

In the course of accomplishing this noble duty, the boy-child has received negative impact. Teachers, parents and policy makers have all in one accord ignored the progress of the male child. The case study of Baba Dogo areas in Nairobi reveals the extent to which the male child is dropping out of school and no one seen to notice or care about it. The transaction model of development used in this paper provides evidence that there is a reason to ask why there is such a trend in the education progress of the boy child , who is in the proximal level of the child and how are they influencing the boy –child education, what care and support is the boy child in the informal settlement lacking?

Evidence from literature and findings in this study shows that among the main factors that contribute to the male child dropping out of school include; home factors, school factors, environmental factors, stereotype about boy child behaviour problem, neighbourhood factors and policy factors. These factors in one way or the other seem to favour the female child more than the male child. The transfer of parental role to the boy child by the household was also evident among the major reasons for school dropout. This paper is meant to raise questions that may be necessary in formulating better education policies and elicit further research in academia and professional spheres on the vulnerabilities of the boy-child.

## References

- [1] Bradley, C. (1995). Women's empowerment and fertility decline in western Kenya. *Situating fertility: Anthropology and demographic inquiry*, 1, 157.
- [2] Chege, F. N., & Sifuna, D. N. (2006). Girls' and women's education in Kenya. *Gender perspectives and trends. Nairobi: UNESCO*.
- [3] Douglas Namale / 11/09/2014 Slum upgrading affected children to be admitted in public schools

- [4] Dryden-Peterson, S. (2011). The Politics of Higher Education for Refugees in a Global Movement for Basic Education. *Refuge*, 27(2), 10-18.
- [5] Fatuma N. Chege, Francis Likoye, Salome Nyambura and Hellen Kiende Guantai( 2014). Declining Boys' Participation and Performance in Kenyan Schools: Are Girls' Education Projects Influencing New Forms of Masculinities? Publisher Academic Journals
- [6] GoK (2005). Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005 – 2010: Delivering quality education, Nairobi, Government Printers
- [7] Mathare Demographic Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 spatial collective. Mtaani insight. Clean water sanitation healthy life <http://mataaniasight.wordpress.com> accessed on 29/4/2015 at 12.50pm.
- [8] McLeod, S. A. (2014). Lev Vygotsky. Retrieved from [www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html)
- [9] MOE, (2006). 'Education monitoring information system (EMIS). 'Ministry of Education, Government of Kenya: Ministry of Education
- [10] Ngware M., Abuya B., Admassu K., Mutisya M., Musyoka P., Oketch M.(2013)Quality and access to education in urban Informal Settlements in Kenya.APHRC.
- [11] Oketch, M. &Ngware , M.W (eds.) (2012).urbanization and Education in East n Africa: African Population and Health Research Center
- [12] Olungah C. Owuor: challenges faced by the boy-child education in Kibera informal settlement. African studies [uonbi.ac.ke/node/506](http://uonbi.ac.ke/node/506)
- [13] Sava L. Andrew & John A. Orodho, (2014) Socio-economic factors influencing pupils'access to education in informal settlements: a case of Kibera, Nairobi county, Kenya. International Journal of Education and Research Vol. 2 No. 3 March 2014
- [14] Somerset, A. (2009). Universalizing primary education in Kenya: the elusive goal. *Comparative Education*, 45(2), 233-250.
- [15] The State of African Cities 2008—A Framework for Addressing Urban Challenges in Africa. Nairobi: UN-HABITAT; 2008
- [16] Wangui I.Chege( unpublished theiss, 2012)An assessment of psychosocial challenges of children in child headed households in Kasarani constituency, Kenya. A masters dissertation at St.Pauls university
- [17] Warrington, M., & Kiragu, S. (2012). "It makes more sense to educate a boy": Girls 'against the odds' in Kajiado, Kenya. *International journal of educational development*, 32(2), 301-309.