

**Assessing how Dropping-Out of School due to FGM Influences Girls’
Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Narok South Sub-County,
Narok County**

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Abstract

Girls’ transition from primary to secondary schools is essential for their socioeconomic development and achievement in education for all. However, public primary schools report low transition rates (40% in 2024) of girls from primary to secondary schools, leading to their exclusion. Despite the presence of 100% transition guidelines and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) goal two that requires all children to complete full course of primary education and transit to secondary schools, challenges persist in achieving this. This study investigated how drop-outs resulting from female genital mutilation impacts girls’ transition to secondary schools in Narok South Sub-County, Narok County. The study drew upon liberal feminism theory. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a descriptive survey design. The target population included 179 head-teachers, 1,288 teachers and 6,998 girls. Krejcie and Morgan 1970 table was used to get a sample size of 118 head-teachers, 291 teachers and 361 girls that were proportionately stratified and randomly selected. Head-teachers were purposefully selected. Data collection tools included questionnaires for teachers and learners; and focus group discussions head-teachers, with validity and reliability assessed for all of them. The quantitative results were presented descriptively using tables and figures, while qualitative ones were presented thematically. The study confirmed that FGM practices negatively affected girls’ transition to secondary schools. Consequently, the study concludes that high dropout rates among girls caused by early marriages, teenage pregnancies, hemorrhage, prolonged healing process, psychosocial and psychological effects significantly impact the transition to secondary schools. The study recommends that Teachers Service Commission prioritize recruiting highly qualified and experienced guidance and counselling teachers in schools, and to fund sanitary kits. The ministry of education should come up with back-to-school policies, implement early drop-out detection guidelines, and build boarding facilities and girl conducive toiletries with water to ensure girls retention for improved transition.

Keywords: *Female genital mutilation, drop-out, girls, girls’ transition, influence, primary schools, secondary schools*

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1.0 Introduction

Girls' transition is significant for achieving children fundamental right to basic education. Moreover, transition contributes towards national development (van Rens, 2020). Learners' transition is explained by the number or percentage of pupils who graduate from the primary basic level of education, to secondary schools to further their studies (Naibei, 2023). Girls' academic progression opens opportunities for developing independence, career progression and enhancing equity and inclusion (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). The need for 100% transition requires preparedness and addressing, environmental, curriculum, cultural, attitudinal, instructional, security, legal and infrastructural challenges (UNICEF, 2020). To qualify learners to join secondary schools, they need to meet the required criteria, such as academic performance, consistency, and possess requisite literacy, cognitive and communication skills (Naibei, 2023).

Globally, in the US, France, Eastern Europe and Japan, the general transition rate of learners from primary to secondary school, irrespective of gender, stands at 96% (van Rens, 2020). Due to the emphasis on 100% transition to secondary schools worldwide, various government interventions, such as education-for-all directives, millennium development goals, and the ministry of education's policies and guidelines have been implemented (Ochieng et al., 2020). The plan and budgetary bills to increase funding allocation towards the ministry of education have also been effected (Muricho, 2023).

Other mechanisms to achieve girls' transition to secondary schools include involvement of humanitarian organizations, introduction of school programs that favor learner retention, and stakeholder collaboration (Spernes, 2022). Parent support, eco-friendly social affairs, economic backgrounds and school environments also shape girls transition to secondary schools (Amenya et al., 2024).

Despite the strength in policies as well as coping mechanisms, transition is influenced by a number of compounding factors. For instance, different countries across the globe, including Netherlands, Australia and Japan, are bedeviled by poor transition rates due to school-based, social-economic and social-cultural factors (van Rens, 2020; Ahinkorah, 2021). Other factors include the distance from school, security, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, nomadism, nature of parents, parental educational status, political instability and FGM (Naibei, 2023).

In Africa, countries such as Tanzania, Somali, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa are reporting challenges in girls' transition to secondary schools (Ndile, 2022; Fara et al. 2022; Delprato & Farieta, 2023). These challenges relate to the influence of social norms that favour boy child education over male cultural practices, inadequate teaching and learning resources, teaching staff competencies, the cost of education, school environment factors, sexual issues, and attitudes by school stakeholders (Namatovu et al., 2023; Fara et al., 2022).

Locally, the government of Kenya has put effort in ensuring that girls access education just as their male counterparts. These efforts are observable in the education-for-all policy,

the Millennium Development Goals and implementation of the 100% transition targets (Naibei, 2023). Another substantive framework that has continued the push for equity in access to education is the Free Primary Education (FPE) program that was initiated by the state in 2003 which give pupils from vulnerable families equal opportunities. However, among the female gender, transition to secondary school rate is persistently going down (Mutundu et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Girls' transition from primary to secondary school is a prime opportunity for girls to lead active and productive lives, contributing to social, political and economic development of their societies (Otieno & Achieng, 2020). However, this life changing opportunity is less explored among the girls, leading to exclusion and reduced academic achievement. The Kenyan government has implemented 100% transition directive and put in place mechanisms, including, aggressive door-to-door campaign, to ensure all children go to school (Daily Nation, February 14, 2020). From these efforts, secondary school transition rate has surged to 73.3% (Daily Nation, February 18, 2020), although great disparities exist when this rate is analyzed per gender. While efforts to sustain transition among pupils are evident, to the female gender, it remains a challenge (Otieno & Achieng, 2020). This challenge is evidenced by huge disconnect between the number of learners who enroll and persist with education, and those that transit to secondary (Gatuura et al., 2023). The study sought to address this gap by examining how

school drop-out rate due to FGM influence transition of girls from primary to secondary education in Narok South Sub-County, Kenya.

Purpose of the Study

The study assessed the influence of FGM on girls' transition from primary to secondary schools in Narok South Sub-County, Narok County in Kenya.

"The paper reports that drop-out rates due to FGM profoundly influence girl's transition to secondary schools through early marriage, pregnancies and absenteeism"

Research Objective

To assess the extent to which drop-out rate as a result of FGM influence girls' transition from primary to secondary schools in Narok South Sub-County, Kenya.

Research Question

How does school dropout rate as a result of FGM influence girls' transition from primary to secondary schools in Narok South Sub-County?

Empirical Review

Female genital mutilation (FGM) involves denaturing of clitori, dismembering or a complete removal of genital organs; a

practice resulting in their dysfunctional (World Health Organization, 2021). FGM as a cultural practice tends to interfere with education goals by ushering girls to motherhood before they realize their career dreams. This heinous rite is predominantly carried out to girls aged 14 years and below, which is the age when girls are pursuing their primary school education (UNICEF, 2020). The children Act, Chapter 141 (2012) strengthen the need for safeguarding girls from detrimental and unfavorable norms, practices and patriarchal rite.

Girls' school drop-out rate refer to the population of female learners that leave school for other activities other than education before completing the designated years in school (Owino, 2018). Dropping out of school may be caused by numerous factors including financial constraints, distance from school, marriage, pregnancies, failing exams, peer pressure, need to work for livelihood, poor guardian regard for education, illnesses and lack of interest (Nungo et al., 2025). Moreover, Adiema and Manasi (2022) submitted that school-based factors and pupils' characteristics contribute significantly to the school drop-out rate.

Scholars across the globe have investigated the consequences of female genital mutilation on girls' education. For instance, in Sweden, Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States. O'Neill and Pallitto (2021) reported that stigmatization, feeling inferior and societal exclusion, lack of acceptability, shame, lack of self-acceptance, and low self- esteem are factors contributing to school drop-out rate. However, their study did not investigate the impact of

psychological characteristics on learner drop-out rates and transition to secondary schools.

More studies on the impact of FGM on girls' transition from primary to secondary schools are needed in African countries. Magige (2020) in their study carried out in Somalia, found that girls must first be initiated through FGM to be viable for marriage. This affects their ability to concentrate with studies. In Zambia, Chavula et al. (2025) noted that the factors that caused pupils disengagement with school were majorly economic, social, gender-related, inequality and long distance to school. They observe that the implementation of re-entry policies is ineffective due to limited government funding, limited community awareness and inadequate school facilities. These studies however, failed to associate girls' drop-out rate with transition to secondary schools. In Kenya, dropping out due to FGM has been explored by Ngumo and Muasa (2022) and Mutai (2021), who noted that high learner drop out trend was occasioned by teenage marriages, teenage pregnancies, poor regard for girl empowerment through education, and regard for cultural norms which interfere with girls education. However, there exists a knowledge gap on the influence of FGM on girls' transition to secondary schools which this study seeks to fill.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the liberal feminism theory propounded by Catherine Mackinnon in 1970. The theory describes how gender equality needs to be reinforced through addressing discrimination, sexual abuse, patriarchy norms, gender stereotypes, objection, women exclusion and oppression.

Mackinnon's theory informs how girls can be facilitated to acquire knowledge through education, and addressing cultural limitations. It substantiates the need to tackle agents of girls drop out in order to improve girls' transition to secondary schools.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in public primary schools in Narok South Sub-County, Narok County, Kenya. It adopted a mixed-method research approach, and a descriptive survey research design. It targeted 179 primary schools, 179 Head-teachers, 1, 288 teachers and 6, 998 girls.. Out of these, 118 primary schools, 118 head-teachers, 291 teachers and 361 girls, making an overall sample size of 770 respondents was obtained using Krejcie and Morgan table (1970). Proportionate stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the participants. The research instruments were questionnaires for school girls and teachers, and focus group discussions for the head-teachers. A pre-test was conducted in five primary schools in Samburu County. Content, construct and face validity for the data collection tools were assessed accordingly. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics like mean, frequencies and percentage. Thematic analysis was applied on qualitative data.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The reliability test was conducted, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.731 was obtained for the objective on girls Drop-out due to FGM. This was reliable and sufficient for analysis as submitted by Yin and Du (2022).

Response Rate

Two ninety one (291) questionnaires were administered to grade 6, 7 and 8 teachers, out of which 227(78.0%) were valid for analysis. For the girls questionnaires', 281(79.5%) were duly filled, hence useful for analysis. The study targeted 9 focus group discussions with head-teachers, and all the 9 groups turned up, representing a 100.0% response rate. This translated to 85.8% overall response rate for the study.

Demographic Information

Findings indicated that there were more female teachers (120, 52.9%) than male (107, 47.1%). This implied that although there are slightly more women teaching in primary schools compared to men, the ratio is somewhat balanced. The results further noted that half of the teachers 125(55.1%) were diploma holders, 42.3% had undergraduate qualifications and only one (1, 0.4%) had KCPE certificate as the highest qualification. Moreover, results on work experience indicated that majority of teachers had worked between 1-5- years 109(48.0%), while 43.2% had 6-10 years work experience. This implied that the respondents had adequate knowledge to provide information required in the study. Further, findings agree with Alahmadi and El Keshky (2019), who assert that knowledge is a prerequisite for enhancing education. For the pupils, 281 (98%) were aged between 10-20 years, while, 50 (17.4%) were victims of FGM. This implies that girls who persisted with school after undergoing FGM were few. Further, the most common reason why FGM practice endured in the Maasai community was to ensure initiation into adulthood 143(49.8%),

immorality-prevention measure 86(29.9%), and an indicator of respect for the peers. Findings reveal that 11-15 years was the prime time when initiation took with 227(79.1%) girls initiated at this age.

Girls Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools

Girls' transition from primary school to secondary school was the study's dependent variable. Teachers gave their opinions in a five point likert scale to measure girls' transition aspects. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Girls transition to secondary schools

Sentiments on girls transition (N = 227)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean
• We have put in place school regulations on 100% girls' transition from primary to secondary schools	100 (44.1%)	88 (38.8%)	8 (3.5%)	18 (7.9%)	13 (5.7%)	1.93
• We have implemented the government's directive on girls' transition from primary to secondary schools	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	102 (44.9%)	111 (48.9%)	13 (5.7%)	3.59
• FGM contributes to low trend in girls' performance hence poor transition	5 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (2.6%)	102 (44.9%)	114 (50.2%)	4.41
• Early teenage marriages due to FGM influences girls' transition from primary to secondary schools	1 (0.4%)	4 (1.8%)	5 (2.2%)	201 (88.5%)	16 (7.0%)	4.00
• Girls drop-out rate due to FGM influences transition from primary to secondary schools	5 (2.2%)	177 (78.0%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (11.0%)	20 (8.8%)	2.46
• Girls absenteeism due to FGM influences transition from primary to secondary schools	5 (2.2%)	10 (4.4%)	4 (1.8%)	188 (88.2%)	20 (8.8%)	3.92
• Girls teenage pregnancies due to FGM influences transition from primary to secondary schools	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.8%)	200 (88.1%)	22 (9.7%)	4.07
• Cultural practices like FGM influences transition from primary to secondary schools	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.8%)	25 (11.0%)	197 (86.8%)	4.84
• FGM lowers girls' ambition for education	6 (2.6%)	33 (14.5%)	63 (27.8%)	73 (32.2%)	52 (22.9%)	3.58

In schools where government's directive on girls' transition from primary to secondary schools was enforced, results show a diversity in perception of teachers on girls'

transition, at a mean of 3.59. However enactment of regulations addressing 100% girls' transition from primary to secondary schools had hardly taken place (mean = 1.93) as demonstrated by 188(82.9%) teachers.

These results communicate the struggles primary schools face in implementing the 100% transition directive by the ministry of education, probably due to lack of roadmaps and localized actionable guidelines.

The teachers perceived cultural practices, particularly FGM as the greatest impediment to transition from primary to secondary schools (mean = 4.84). This was supported by the specific factors such as girls' performance (mean = 4.41), teenage pregnancies (mean = 4.07), teenage marriages (mean = 4.00), absenteeism (mean = 3.92) and countering girls school drop-outs. In contrast, Farah et al. (2022) avers that the key hindrance to education was devaluation of girls education, cultural practices, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, inadequate facilities, ineffective instructional delivery, teacher student ratio and the cost of education.

Transition rates of girls

Open-ended questions to the teachers and grade 6, 7 and 8 learners required them to suggest what they thought needed to be done

to improve girls' transition from primary to secondary in their schools. Responses given including: early identification and tracking of girls at risk, strengthening academic performance, involving parents and guardians in the education of their children, strengthening financial support for girls from extremely poor backgrounds, strengthening confidential counselling services, addressing menstruation and health barriers, and using FGM affected alumnae role models to motivate other girls. Head-teachers' focused group discussions stressed the need for secondary school re-entrance strategy after drop out due to pregnancy and maternity needs, home visits for girls before-the school opens to identify pregnant and teenage mothers who have not returned to school, and promoting the 100% transition directive as given by the minister of education. Focused Group Discussion 004 added *we provide self-defense training to girls at risk to help them keep safe even after FGM; this contributes to school retention and progress through secondary school*.

Table 2

Rate of transition to secondary schools

Extend	General transition regardless of gender (%)	Transition for girls Undergone FGM (%)	Transition for girls Not undergone FGM (%)
Very Low	0(0.0%)	49(22.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Low	0(0.0%)	97(42.8%)	52 (22.9%)
Average	7(3.1%)	63(27.9%)	23(10.2%)
Above average	31(13.7%)	18(6.3%)	131(57.6%)
High	186(83.1%)	0(0.0%)	21(9.3%)
Very high	3(0.1%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)

The results in Table 2 show high level of transition (83.1%) for pupils from primary to secondary schools regardless of gender.

When results are limited to the female gender, the rate of transition is still low. 131 (57.6%) of the teachers admitted that the rate of girls transition to secondary among those

who had not undergone FGM practice was above average. 97 (42.8%) said that transition to secondary schools was low among girls who had undergone FGM in Narok South Sub-County. The findings indicated that the general transition rate among girls in Narok-South is low with distinct disparities observable between girls affected by FGM and those not undergo it. These results compared with the findings of Omuse (2017) who submitted that there is a lower transition rate of girls as given by 48.7% from public primary schools to secondary schools in Teso South Sub County.

However, the results did not compare the difference in transition among girls affected by FGM and those who had not.

Girls drop-out from school due to FGM

Quantitative analysis of girls' drop-out rate as influenced by FGM was rated on a 5-level Likert scale, and each teacher respondent was asked to give their perception by ticking what they feel about each of the constructs; where 1 represented strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 was coded to represent strongly agree. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Girls drop out of school

Sentiments on girls drop-out of school (N = 227)	SD(1)	D(2)	N(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean
• FGM contribute to girls' dropout rates from schools	1 (0.4%)	6 (2.2%)	101 (44.5%)	105 (46.3%)	15 (6.6%)	3.56
• Girls' become indiscipline after undergoing the rite of passage	1 (0.4%)	8 (3.5%)	89 (39.2%)	104 (45.8%)	25 (11.0%)	3.63
• FGM has a relation with issues like girls not completing their education	98 (43.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (7.0%)	113 (49.8%)	3.20
• School attendance is usually affected after FGM performance	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	112 (49.3%)	114 (50.2%)	4.49
• FGM causes girls to focus more on outside issues apart from education	1 (0.4%)	5 (2.2%)	2 (0.9%)	106 (46.7%)	113 (49.8%)	4.43
• Majority of girls drop out of school due to early pregnancy	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	111 (48.9%)	115 (50.7%)	4.49
• FGM After the practice girls focus more on marriage life than on education issue	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.8%)	18 (7.9%)	204 (89.9%)	4.87
• We have guidance and counseling services for students who have undergone FGM so that they can feel accepted within the school environment	6 (2.6%)	46 (20.3%)	94 (41.4%)	14 (6.2%)	67 (29.5%)	3.40
• We have guidance and counseling services for students who have not undergone FGM so that they can feel accepted within the school environment	32 (14.1%)	115 (50.7%)	20 (8.8%)	10 (4.4%)	50 (22.0%)	2.70

The results in table 3 narrowed down on seven aspects which were perceived as influential aftermath of FGM practices resulting in girls dropping out of school in Narok South Sub-county. The seven aspects were: preference for marriage over education, early pregnancies, absenteeism, and increased indiscipline after undergoing FGM. These results corroborate with the observations made by Magige (2020), who reported that girls who have undergone FGM hardly concentrate on learning, but rather become difficult, stubborn, undisciplined, play truancy and generally become champions of school drop-out.

Grade 6, 7 and 8 girls in Narok South Sub-County were required to answer question if they knew any of their class mates discontinued school after undergoing FGM. From the responses given, an average of 258(90.0%) classmates were reported to have dropped-out of school after undergoing FGM. The girls were further requested to tell where those classmates went after dropping out of school. The responses revealed that such girls got married, some stayed at home doing domestic chores, took care of babies and went to the market and nearby towns to get manual employment especially housekeeping.

When the teachers were asked in an open-ended question to suggest what should be done to reduce girls' drop-out cases in public primary schools, they provided eighty three suggestions. Four themes stood out distinctively which were: strict enforcement of anti-FGM laws especially on early marriages, investing in girls empowerment programs to enable them know their rights,

reintegration of come back to school programs after dropping out, involving all stakeholders such as men, women, government authorities, parents, students and the elderly in conversations to shift from harmful gender norms, and promotion of equality in the society. Teacher number 89 emphasized that *'community education to parents, guardians, and community leaders about the harmful effects of FGM and the importance of keeping girls in school need to be emphasized so as to change their attitudes and traditions through dialogue and reduce girls' pressure to drop out'*.

Head-teachers were asked to state ways through which they helped in getting dropped-out girls back to school following the revelation that 5 to 10 girls drop out of school each year after undergoing FGM. All the nine focus group discussions noted that counselling and emotional support, close monitoring and support to prevent further drop-out, awareness meetings that challenge FGM were being practiced. The focused group number 005 added *"We work with teachers, counselors, and local education officers to identify girls who have dropped out and conduct home visits to speak with their parents or guardians. During the home visits, we encourage them to allow their daughters to return to school, as we explain the long-term value of education"*.

4.0 Conclusion

The study demonstrates that drop-out rates due to FGM profoundly influence girl's transition to secondary schools in Narok South Sub-County. In particular, preference for marriage, early pregnancies, absenteeism due to health complications and indiscipline

after FGM collectively increase drop-out rate for girls. While areas for community awareness exist, early identification and tracking of girls at risk, strengthening financial support to girls, strengthening confidential counselling services, addressing menstruation and health barriers and celebrating transition using FGM affected alumnae role models to motivate other girls is needed.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends the Teachers Service Commission to prioritize counselling and emotional support to help girls recover from FGM trauma by recruiting and placing

teachers with strong academic qualifications and relevant experience in counselling education. Additionally, the ministry of education should invest in specialized training programs for teachers, PTA, BOM and the Chiefs to create awareness, challenge the cultural practice of FGM, and advocate for girls rights. Head-teachers should closely monitor school attendance, and use role model girls to prevent further drop-out cases and improve secondary school transition rates. Moreover, MOE is recommended to strengthen re-admission to school strategy after drop out due to pregnancy and maternity needs.

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