

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG THE GIRLS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

Though a lot of research have been concerned with school dropout issue for both girls and boys, dropout pattern significantly differs by the gender of the students. This paper clarifies the factors that contribute to the increasing dropout rate of children, particularly among girls by making a detailed review of available literature. Most past reviews on the school dropout issue have been carried out regardless of the gender of the students. A few of the studies in this context have been done on girls' dropout outcome based on particular regions and cultures of the world. In this paper, we identify the factors and illustrate a conceptual model for girls' dropout from school. We demonstrate that though some factors can cause an increase in the dropout rate regardless of the gender of students, these factors mainly contribute to an increase in the dropout rate particularly for female students. In our conceptual model we try to illustrate how a range of particular factors can affect students' educational outcome which consequently produce dropout among girls in schools in general. And finally, we provide a few recommendations which policy planners may adopt in reducing girls' dropout from schools.

**Keywords:** School dropout, girls' education, educational inequality.

### INTRODUCTION

The development of a society can be judged by measuring the issues that extend educational inequality prevalent in the society. The prevalence of unequal distribution of education in male and female students hinders the development at every stage of a nation. According to the World Conference on Education (2001), all children, particularly girls, must have access to and complete quality education by the year 2015. We know it very well that both boys and girls have equal right to be educated and in developing a nation it is important to provide education irrespective of gender.

a growing body of literature shows that girls' dropout rates are higher compared to boys' in most parts of the world. For instance, according to UNESCO (2012), the dropout rate is higher for girls in 49 countries compared to boys. Chimombo (1999) observes that though the enrolment in school is almost same for girls and boys, boys have a higher likelihood of continuing school compared to girls. Holmes (2003) also found that girls overall attain less education and tend to drop out earlier as compared to boys.

Thus, when dropout rate varies by gender and if girls tend to drop out earlier compared to boys, it manifests that there are some unique factors contributing to the increase in the dropout rate, particularly for girls. In other words, there are some factors which extensively contribute to an increase in girls' dropout though those factors also impact dropout rate for boys. In this respect,

the findings of Holcamp (2009) also support our argument when the author found that some socio-cultural factors highly impact girls' dropout rate though those factors also contribute to boys' dropout rate but to a lesser extent. Therefore, we can argue that some particular factors produce poor educational outcome which consequently increase the dropout rate for girls. Therefore, from this viewpoint, the main objective of this paper is to clarify which factors contribute to the increase in the dropout rate, particularly among girls which are not quite clear in past reviews on the dropout issue. Dropout rate does not occur through a single factor; it is a composition of several factors. A number of studies have been conducted on girls' dropout issue based on particular regions, societies and cultural perspectives in various parts of the world. In this paper, we accumulate the factors and illustrate a conceptual model of dropout for girls which can give further opportunity to researchers to view the relevant factors on girls' dropout issue. For better demonstration we have divided all the factors into four groups which are (1) economic factors, (2) household level factors, (3) school level factors and (4) cultural factors.

## **ECONOMIC FACTORS**

### **Parental Investment**

Parental investment for children's well-being can sometimes become gender biased. Although parents are altruistic to the gender of their children, they do not invest in education equally for all. In this regard, there are considerable evidences in the literature (Glick & Sahn, 2000; Kingdon, 2005) supporting this view whereby that, there is gender bias or pro-male bias in case of parental investment in children. In addition, Leung and Zhang (2008) found that parents' preference for sons encourage more of them to invest for in their sons' well-being to take care of parents in the future. In fact, parental gender bias investment occurs particularly when parents have limited/lower income and resource, causing girls to leave school earlier than boys. For instance, Fuller and Laing (1999) and Grant and Hallman (2006) found an association between a family's financial strength and the likelihood of the daughter's dropout in South Africa.

### **Schooling Costs**

Direct and indirect schooling costs are important factors for the education of children and some research indicate that schooling costs especially school fees, are a central reason for early dropout from schools. Schooling costs are sometimes linked to the gender of the children as parents are sometimes become unwilling to pay schooling fees for their daughters. For instance, Brown and Park (2002) investigated that in rural China, parents' incapability to pay compensate school fees was the reason for the dropout of 47% of girls while only 33% of boys dropout in elementary schools; in junior secondary high school, fees were half for the girls but only 8% for the boys. Hunter and May (2002) found that school fees were significant reason for the dropout rate of 27% of boys but 30 % of girls before secondary school graduation in South Africa. From the families' perspective, Shovan Ghosh Susmita & Sengupta (2012) observe that in poor households in India, the costs of schooling for girls are likely to be higher while the benefits more tenuous for them than the boys. The authors also observe that though direct costs are similar for boys and girls, parents are less willing to spend on girls. Lloyd et. al. (2000) also found that in Kenya, higher school fees increases the likelihood of dropping out for girls but not for boys.

## **HOUSEHOLD LEVEL FACTORS**

### **Household Work**

There is substantial literature regarding how a child's work impacts on educational outcome regardless of the gender of the children. Many studies observe that girls sometimes begin working at an earlier age than boys especially in rural areas and girls also tend to do more work in the household than boys. Studies indicate that female students tend to drop out of school to take care of their younger siblings (Brock & Cammish, 1997). Another study found that if children less than 6 years old are present at home, elder sisters are more likely to drop out (Canagarajah & Coulombe, (1997). Another research indicates that if mothers work and get wage outside of the home, Female children take some responsibilities of the household which causes them to drop out, Fuller & Liang (1999). In general, girls take more load of household chores than the boys and on the other hand rural girls do more household works than urban girls (Ersado, 2005).

### **Female Involvement in Household Chores**

Fuller and Liang (1999) argue that the advantage of having females as household heads may be the result of increased autonomy of the females when males are absent in the decision-making process. Shahidul (2013) examine data in Bangladesh and found that if a mother participates in the household's decision-making process, the dropout rate of girls is decreased. Though female headship eventually gives advantage to girls, studies sometimes show controversial results. This is because, many studies found that single-female headed households face greater financial and time constraints than two-parent households in general which may impact differently on children's academic achievement (Guo & Harris, 2000; Pong et al., 2003). In fact, children in households headed by married women have higher educational attainment while children of widows are more likely to work.

## **SCHOOL LEVEL FACTORS**

### **Extra-curricular Activities**

There are several evidence that shown participation in extra-curricular activities varied by gender and girls are usually less participative than boys. For instance, Jacqueline et al. (2012) investigated gender dynamics in the valuing of extra-curricular activities and their survey results show a significant difference in the proportion of participation in extra-curricular activities of male and female students. Results show that approximately 76% of male students participate in extracurricular activities compared to only 48% of female students. Sometime girls' participation in extra-curricular activities constrained by the lack of facilities in schools. For instance Osiki Jonathan Ohiorenuan (2008) observes that 90% of the schools in the study area had extra-curricular facilities for the boys but the facilities for the girls were either not available or were provided minimally. This occurs in schools in most developing countries, especially in the rural areas.

Another foremost constraint is that some societies consider sports as a male activity. For instance, in Senegal participation in sports is socially and culturally prohibited for Muslim women (Hewett, 2010). In England, during the secondary school cycle, Muslim women face restrictions

by their culture and religion to participate in sports activities in schools (Benn, 2002; Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993). In fact, Muslim culture does not permit some kit requirements of sports or outdoor games such as wearing short skirts, shorts and tee-shirts and public changing and showering.

### **Female Teacher in School**

Several studies examined the impact of female teachers on the educational achievement of girls. Solotaroff et al. (2007) found that in Afghanistan, lack of female teachers is an obstacle to girls' participation and enrollment in schools. Afghan people believe that girls should not be taught by male teachers, however, female teachers are not available in Afghan society which is the foremost reason for the low rate of female education. Solotaroff, et al. (2007) presented that in Pakistan, girls usually drop out early because of lacking of female teachers in schools. In these societies, parents tend to stop their daughters' education before adulthood as female teachers are not available in schools. Though parents are sometimes reluctant to send girls to schools based on their religious feelings, in fact female teachers are effective in achieving educational outcome for female students. In this respect, a number of studies have attempted to examine the effect of having female teachers in schools. For instance, many studies found that having female teachers in the school has a positive impact on female students' academic achievement outcomes (Carrell et al., 2010; Hoffman & Nixon, 2009; Rothstein, 1995; Robinson, 1999). Therefore, lack of female teachers in school negatively impacts on girls' dropout outcome.

### **Absenteeism**

Research also indicates that irregular attendance can be a precursor for dropping out from school regardless of the gender of the pupils. However, it can be argued that school absenteeism can be somewhat negatively more effective for early dropout from school female students. In this regard, Manacorda (2012) also argues that girls are at a greater risk of absenteeism, repetition and dropout, and have lower educational achievement than boys in upper primary school. There are some causes for girls' dropout because of absenteeism. For instance, teenage pregnancy among girl is commonly associated with frequent absence from school initially, then permanent and or temporary dropout. Girls also can more drop out because of absenteeism due to child labour or household work. This is because a good deal of literature on household work found that girls do more household work than boys which may increase non-attendance in schools for girls. Moreover, availability of toilets and access to feminine hygiene supplies impact on girls' absenteeism. In this regard, Gran (2013) indicates that female students were more likely to be absent if their toilets at school were dirty. In addition, Ngales (2005) found that in Ethiopia, female students were often absent in class during menstruation and frequent absence led them to drop out from school.

### **Feminine Facilities in Schools**

Inadequate sanitation facilities in schools massively affect girls' dropout because this inadequacy indicates that schools are not safe for girls. Lizettee (2000) observes that though lack of facilities and poor hygiene affect both girls and boys, sanitation in schools has a strong negative impact on girls. Parents expect safe and separate sanitation for their daughters in schools. In fact,

especially for girls entering adulthood, they need to have separate and adequate facilities for their menstruation time in school; without proper facilities it would discourage them from being in school and consequently they tend to drop out (Lizettee, 2000). Birdsall et al. (2005) argue that girls' privacy issue in schools is foremost a factor which forces girls to drop out from schools. UNICEF (2009) further notice that separate hygienic toilets should be made available for boys and girls when designing the facilities of a school. UNICEF (2006) observe that in Africa, the lack of basic sanitation is the cause decreasing enrollment of girls in secondary schools but girls spend more time in schools when sanitation facilities are adequate. UNICEF (1998) further observe that if the toilets are shared by girls and boys or are closely located in schools a significant number of girls drop out because of harassment and lack of privacy.

### **Teachers' Attitude**

Much research have examined how teachers' attitudes toward female students are linked to dropout issue. Colclough et al. (2000) found that in Ethiopia, teachers in school more positively viewed boys than girls because they usually expect girls to quit school early. Teachers' attitude and their teaching practices have foremost impact in sustaining girls in schools. According to Nekatibeb (2002) study from several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that both female and male teachers believed that boys were academically better than girls. This study also found that most teachers tend to pay more attention to boys in the classroom than girls. Research by Fawe (2001) shows that teachers were not conscious in using their language toward girls in the classroom. They also viewed girls as less intelligent to those boys and that girls are just there to marry early. According to Njau and Wamahiu (1994) in a study on dropout rates in Sub-Saharan Africa, it was found that the foremost cause of higher rate of girls' dropout was the attitude of teachers towards girls in class. Teachers tend to favour to boys than girls in terms of academic performance and achievement which led to dropout.

### **School Distance**

School distance is an important determinant of school dropout for female students. Juneja (2001) observes that if school distance is considered too far from home, young girls tend to drop out more due to for the vulnerability to sexual harassment (Colclough et al., 2000; Nekatibeb, 2002). Parents are afraid for the safety of their children when they have to travel longer distances to school. Ainsworth et al. (2005) found that the likelihood of attending secondary school for girls decreases with the greater the distance compared to the nearer secondary schools. Nekatibeb (2002) also determinants that school distance is the foremost obstacle for girls' education in many countries in Africa. A large number of studies in African regions report that school distance can discourage girls from being educated for two major problems. One of them is the length of time and energy needed to cover the distance for children with empty stomachs. Another is parental anxiety about sexual safeguard of their daughters. School distance gives the motivation to girls to stay in school. Ainsworth et al. (2005) found that close proximity to schools had a positive motivating impact on girls.

## **CULTURAL FACTORS**

### **Early Marriage**

Regarding the effect of early marriage on girls Holcamp (2009) found that in rural areas girls' dropout rate became higher because parents consider girls' schooling as of no benefit when they leave their own family after getting married. Mansory (2007) also found that early marriage is the foremost cause of early school dropout of girls in Afghanistan. A lot of research have highlighted on girls' age and education and found that when girls reach puberty, parents consider it is time for them to be married and tend to arrange the marriage instead of continuing schooling (Molteno et al., 2000). Some studies argue that early marriage of girls is associated with dropouts in certain contexts. For instance, in societies where girls leave parental household after marriage, girls' dropout might be higher in that society (Ackers et al., 2001). The PROBE team (1999) of India reported that in that country education might give girls better preparation for marriage however, despite this, parents sometimes are reluctant to let their daughters have their education as higher education raises the cost of marriage for girls. Shahidul (2012) also found that in Bangladesh girls with lower socioeconomic backgrounds drop out from secondary school when schooling or higher education inflates dowry in the marriage market of girls. In this research, author argues that if girls have higher education but have lower parental socio-economic background, they face difficulties in getting a husband because pattern in which parents need to pay a higher amount of dowry to marry their educated daughters to similarly educated grooms thus resulting in early dropout among girls.

### **Pregnancy**

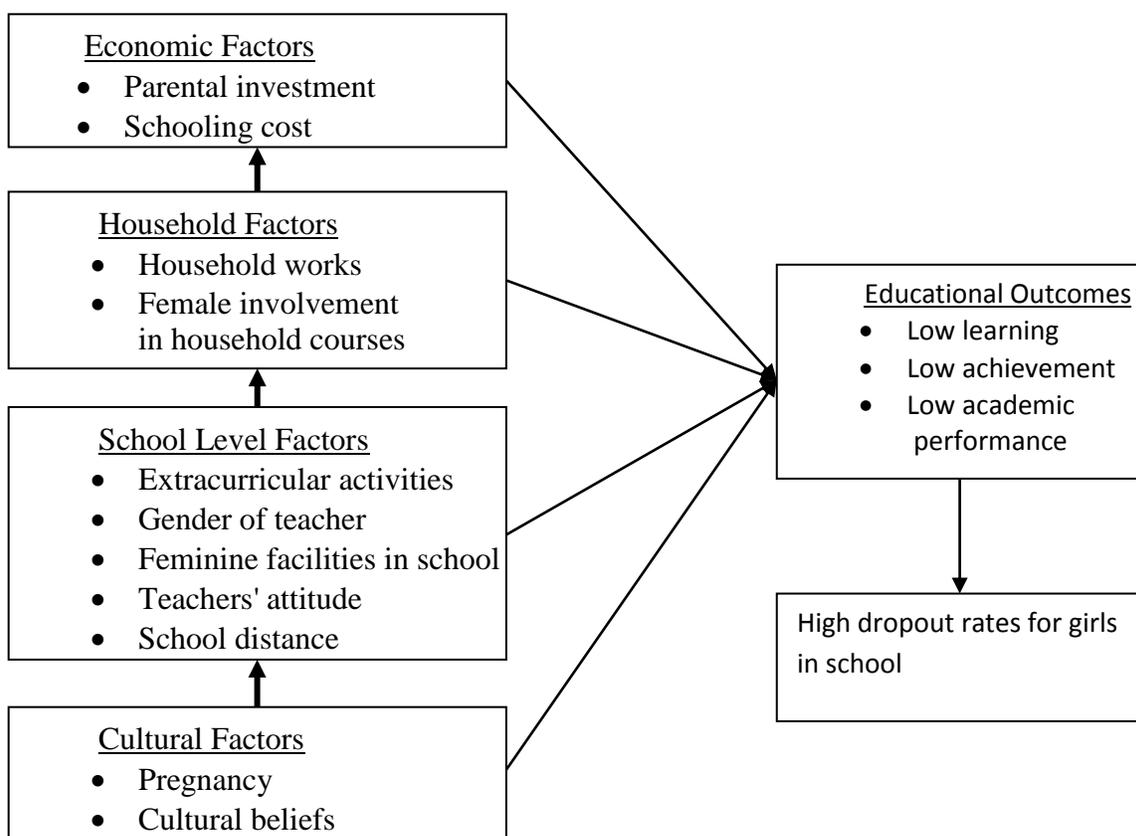
Several studies also found that investigated that teenage pregnancy is a significant cause of school dropout for girls (Boyle et al., 2002). Some studies argue that there are some specific characteristics of girls with dropout status which are: Girls with poor school performance, girls who have experienced temporary dropout previously, low economic statu, family migratory life styles and the consequent vulnerability of girls. Dunne Leach, (2005) argue that some unexpected circumstances of girls such as lack of social and economic opportunities and gender inequality in education system lead to motherhood and consequence dropout from schools. Dunne and Leac (2005) state that the dropout rate of girls is higher than the dropout rate of boys and the foremost cause for girls to drop out is pregnancy. Though some countries permit girls after getting pregnant to return to school, research found that the re-entry rate is not much higher. According to Grant and Hallman (2006), re-entry to school after pregnancy depends on some circumstances such as if they can get caregiver for their child and if they are able to share or relinquish childcare responsibilities.

### **Cultural Beliefs**

Save the Children (2005) indicates that cultural norms and beliefs constrain girls' education especially in many developing parts of the world. In these societies, traditional values and some religious beliefs constrain girls from making their own decisions and expressing their own opinions. Chege and Sifuna (2006) examined claim that many cultures favor education for boys more than girls. Kapakasa (1992) studied girls' persistence in school and found that initiation ceremonies (religious ceremony) have significant effect on girls' dropout rate when parents have

more propensity to pay for the expenses of the ceremony than their daughters' education. Abena (1991) and Atayi (2008) observe that in Africa parents were more concerned about the role for girls at home as in this role, girls do not need education since they are supposed to take care of the children and prepare meals. Falkingham and Baschieri (2006) observed that in Tajikistan many girls attend only religious classes which provide relevant skills for future married life as skilled wives. Sawada and Lokshin (2009) found that purdah (ideal) or seclusion of women was a factor for girls' dropout. However, traditional values can be different from location to location and in this respect, UNESCO (2010) indicate that traditional values are stronger in rural areas in developing countries compared to urban areas and people often do not allow girls to leave homes even for schools.

### Conceptual Model of Girls Dropout Rate



**FIGURE 1.** Conceptual Model Shows the Affecting Feature of Factors which Contribute to School Dropout Outcome for Girls. Source: Authors

It is well documented that students' educational outcome is related to a range of factors and when some factors produce poor educational outcomes, they will which likely increase the dropout rate of students. In this respect, much of the literature examined students' low educational outcomes and among them, low learning level (Croft, 2002), low achievement level (Boyle et al., 2002; Hunter & May, 2003) and low academic performance or academic results (Batbaatar, et al., 2006) are more likely to cause dropout from schools. Therefore, based on the affecting factors of school dropout for girls, we can make the following conceptual model. In our conceptual model

we try to illustrate how a range of particular factors can be effective on students' educational outcome which produces the dropout of girls from schools in general.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that though several inter-related social, economic, school and cultural factors affect school dropout outcome regardless of the gender of the students, among some particular factors increase the dropout rate particularly for girls. These particular factors produce lower educational outcomes for girls in general. The financial factors constrain parents more especially those who have lower socioeconomic status compared to those who have higher status. Parents with lower socio-economic status face difficulties to bear the expenses of their daughters' education. In addition, parents sometimes use the gender of their children to decide who gets more education so that children can give benefit in the future; in these circumstances male children eventually get more priority compared to female children. Besides these, girls also experience disadvantage for the unequal labour force participation in the world. Female usually experience less opportunities especially in productivity in the labour market and earn less compared to males which discourage parents from continuing the education of their daughters.

Some school level factors insufficiently affect the increase in dropout rate of girls. However, most of these factors are allied with school resources and an unequal distribution of school resources markedly linked to the geographical location of schools. Schools in urban regions facilitate more for girls compared to schools in rural regions. For instance, sanitation facilities, equipment of extracurricular activities, quality female teachers and other resources and environmental factors which are less available in rural schools. In these respect a growing body of literature has found that girls' dropout rate is significantly higher in rural schools compared to urban schools. Inequalities in school resources exist much especially in developing countries compared to developed countries and this is because dropout rates of girls are higher in the developing parts of the world. Cultural reasons also play an important role in high incidence of early dropout of girls. Sometime it depends on parents on how to perceive girls' education. On the one hand, there are human perceptions formed by several factors such as education, socio-economic status, religion and environment of the community where they live in. These perspectives constrain girls' education especially in developing regions of the world. Some traditional cultural practices and beliefs of a particular religion or community massively affect as barriers to girls' education, especially in the male-dominated societies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above discussion, this study provides a few important recommendations which the policy planners may adopt for future intervention. Governments should plan some special policies to improve female education like introducing special stipends for female students and also making education free for them. Although some countries have already taken some steps in this regard, it is important to expand it further for other countries. It is also necessary for governments to invest more money in making the environment favourable and sensitive for girls. Governments should also provide school supplies adequately according to the demands of the students. In both primary and secondary schools, trained and qualified female teachers especially during the developmental stage of girls should be made available which can also prevent pregnancy problem among girls leading to early dropout.

## DIRECTION FOR THE FURTHER RESEARCH

We observe that most of the studies measured the direct impacts of the factors on dropout outcome of girls. However, the effect of a factor sometimes can be mediated by other underlying factors. Therefore, to clarify the effects of these factors on dropout outcome we recommend measuring the meditative effects / causal effects of the factors. In addition, our proposed conceptual model can be a direction for the scholars.

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