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## Relationship between conflict factors and enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya

Ropilo Lanyasunya<sup>(1)</sup>

Fredrick B. J. A. Ngala<sup>(3)</sup>

Betty Talai Tikoko<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1,2,3) Kabarak University, Kenya

Main author email: [ropilolanyasunya@gmail.com](mailto:ropilolanyasunya@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

The study sought to investigate the relationship between inter-group conflict and enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. Despite Kenya's government's effort to promote girls' education, gender disparities still exist in rural areas. Thus, the objectives of this study are to examine the relationship between selected factors of loss of human lives, loss of livelihood source, displacements, fear of attack, and learning disruption and enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. The researcher used a descriptive correlation survey design. The study was viewed from the premise of Social Conflict Theory by Oberschall. The target population of the research was 136 female teachers and 135 headteachers who happened to be male teachers from rural public primary schools in Samburu County. The sample size for the study was 136 female teachers and 27 headteachers. Out of these, 14 female teachers and 3 headteachers were used for piloting. The researcher used the census method for female teachers who responded to the questionnaires, and a purposive sampling technique was applied for head teachers whose data was obtained using interview schedules. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient showed a statistically significant moderate negative correlation of -0.537 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.005, indicating significance at the 5 per cent level. This indicates that higher levels of inter-group conflict factors are linked to a reduction in girls' enrollment in the region. The study recommends the government's resolve to end inter-group conflict in Samburu County.

**Key words:** Displacements, fear of attack, girls enrolment, inter-group conflict, rural schools.



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## INTRODUCTION

Girls' education plays a central role in women, family and societal development. However, inter-group conflicts have been blamed for interfering with enrolment of girls in primary school. Inter-group conflict is a struggle between two or more interdependent persons over presumed incompatible differences in values, beliefs and goals or differences in desires for a sense of worth, control and connectivity.

In 2015, more than 2.1 million children of five and seventeen years were out of school in the Syrian Arab Republic owing to armed conflict: similarly, in 2002, 82 per cent of the one hundred and thirteen million children not in school were living in conflict-stricken countries (Save the Children, 2017).

Girls are more affected by conflict. Parents in conflict areas tend to worry about their girls' safety, thus curtailing their freedom of movement, especially when the school is far from home, for fear of physical abuse and abduction (Otieno, 2020; Department for International Development-DFID, 2020). This study aims at finding the relationship between fear of attack while going to school and the attendance of girls in primary school.

In 2011, due to cattle rustling raids in Samburu County, twenty-nine primary schools closed: about seven thousand pupils were forced to run away with their families far from school proximity (ReliefWeb, 2017). Consequently, Mongare and Mutuma (2021) observed that parents of children enrolled in schools in Samburu County have had to frequently withdraw their children from school due to insecurity issues in the region. It is, therefore, the intention of this study to seek answers on the relationship between inter-group conflict and the enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya.

A lot has been said and done to improve the enrolment of girls in primary schools globally and in Kenya. However, Samburu County still registers a persistent low enrolment of girls, especially in its rural public primary schools. In 2022, girls comprise a meagre 36.5 per cent gross enrolment in rural primary schools in Samburu County (MOE Samburu, 2022). Studies done in Kenya by Farah et al. (2019) reveal the detrimental impact of insecurity and inter-

clan conflicts on girls' education is a significant deterrent to their enrollment in schools. These findings underscore the need for a context-specific understanding of the role of inter-group conflict in other nomadic areas so that resolution measures to support girls' educational prospects are found and put in place. Unless the problem of low enrolment of girls in rural primary schools is not addressed, the rights of girls in remote areas will be at stake, and rural areas will continue lagging behind in development.

Thus, the need behind this study is to find out the relationship between inter-group conflict and the enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. Therefore, there is a need to delve into non-economic and non-quantitative barriers, expand the geographic focus, and concentrate on primary schools, specifically exploring girls' unique challenges.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflicts have a drawback on the number of girls being enrolled in primary schools, their access to education, and their sustained engagement. For young people experiencing conflict, the long-term effects of missing a lot of schools or quitting school learning altogether include a loss of opportunity (Kiprono et al., 2019).

Farah et al. (2021) posit that in Mandera County, inter-clan conflicts negatively affect institutional infrastructure, pedagogy environment, and institutional personnel. A study also by Wangechi (2021) in Nakuru County revealed that ethnic conflicts unsettle societal order and consequently negatively affect the participation of girl children in school.

A study by Lokaale et al. (2019) purposed to check conditions that impair the joining of schools by children in conflict-susceptible regions of the Sub-County of Turkana East found out that even learning institutions were not spared during inter-faction conflicts. This adversely disrupted smooth operations in schools, with a majority of schools reporting pupil displacement.

A study by Alfano et al. (2023) investigated the relationship between attacks by terror groups and

going to school children in Kenya. It found that this affected the readiness of parents to send their children to school as much as children also were reluctant to go out of their homes.

Mwiruki (2021) probed the impact of conflict situations on schooling in Ilala, Tanzania and realised that it affected the total school environment, including school management's ability to manage schools. Kiprop et al. (2019) delved into understanding ways in which inter-communal discord disturbed the school learning programmes in Tiaty, Baringo County and noted that both aggressive environments negatively impact girls schooling.

### METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive correlational research, which is aimed at describing relationships between independent and dependent variables. The survey method was applied for the data collection by use of questionnaires and interview schedules. The target population for this study was the 136 female teachers and the 135 head teachers in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya.

Questionnaires were used to collect data from female teachers and interview schedules for head teachers. The questionnaires used four-degree Likert-type items in order to avoid neutral responses. The data collected was analysed descriptively, and percentages were computed. Correlation analysis was done to test the existence, direction, and degree of the relationship between selected factors and the enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County, Kenya. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was extracted through regression analysis to test for significance.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that generally, loss of human lives affects the enrolment of girls in schools, as agreed by 78.5 per cent of the respondents. The reasons given behind this were that conflicts are frequent in the area (85%) and cause an impact on girls' enrolment (76.2%). Death of breadwinners occurs as a result of conflict (65.4%), and this affects girls' enrolment (85.3%). Similarly, many girls are left as orphans as a result, and 76 per cent of the

respondents were in agreement that it impacts girls' primary school enrolment.

Further, 80.1 per cent of the respondents agreed that loss of livelihood source related to the enrolment of girls in schools. They qualified this assertion by stating that the loss of livestock due to raids impacts girls' schooling (85.1%) and also the loss of grazing land (75.1%).

Moreover, 82.2 per cent of the respondents generally agreed that displacement/forced migrations had a relationship with the enrolment of girls in schools, while on the other hand, they said that displacement/forced migrations affected the enrollment of girls in schools. The reasons are that general displacements occur and affect girls (84.2%), families move away from school (83.4%), displacements disrupt livelihoods (80.4%), disrupt the learning cycle of girls in school (77.1%), and displacements push girls out of school (86.1). This aligns with the empirical literature, which emphasises that displacements, whether due to conflicts or other reasons, can significantly hinder girls' schooling. Research conducted by Oxfam (Rutandaro et al., 2022) also highlights the negative effect of displacements on girls' education.

Fear of attack has also been mentioned by the majority (82.1%) of the respondents as correlating with an enrolment of girls in primary school in rural Samburu. They clarified this by mentioning that girls fear that they can be attacked while going to school (85.3%), and their parents fear for their girls' safety (82.1%). Families also take refuge in the bushes (78.9%). This aligns with findings from research conducted by Mararo (2020), which highlights that insecurity and violence in conflict-affected areas can deter parents from sending their daughters to school.

Additionally, 77.6 per cent of the respondents agreed that learning disruption relates to the enrolment of girls in schools, noting that teachers run away from school (88.3%) due to conflicts. Inter-group conflicts also cause school closures (85.3%) and the destruction of school infrastructure (70.4%). Similarly, 80.1 per cent of respondents in this study agreed that inter-group conflicts lead to a loss of livelihood sources. This finding is consistent with research from Concern Worldwide U.S. (2022) and

Valente et al. (2022), which have emphasised how conflicts disrupt economic activities and livelihoods. The loss of livelihood sources can have long-lasting effects on families, making it challenging for parents to support their children's education.

Another significant result is that 72.2 per cent of respondents agreed that inter-group conflicts result in displacement. This aligns with findings in studies like those conducted by Benhura and Naidu (2021) and Lokaale et al. (2019), which have shown that conflicts often force families to leave their homes, leading to internal displacement. Displacement not only disrupts living arrangements but also access to education, particularly for girls who may be reluctant or unable to attend school in unfamiliar and insecure environments.

Furthermore, the study revealed that 82.1 per cent of respondents agreed with the fear of attack during inter-group conflicts. This finding supports the concerns raised by organisations like UNICEF (Relief Web, 2020) and findings from Rutandaro et al. (2022). Fear of attacks, especially among girls, is a significant barrier to school attendance during conflicts. The literature suggests that girls are at a higher risk of violence and abduction when walking to school or even while in school due to ongoing conflicts.

Lastly, the study indicated that 77.6 per cent of respondents agreed with learning disruption during inter-group conflicts. This result is in line with findings from studies like Farah et al. (2021) and Onyango (2020), which have highlighted the disruptive impact of conflicts on education. Conflict-related disruptions, such as damage to school infrastructure and the displacement of teachers and students, can severely affect the continuity of education. Girls, in particular, may face challenges in resuming their education after such disruptions.

In summary, the results of this study closely align with the empirical literature on the impact of inter-group conflicts on various aspects, including loss of life, livelihood, displacement, fear of attack, and learning disruption. These similarities emphasise the universal challenges faced by nomadic pastoralist communities, especially girls, in conflict-affected areas. It underscores the significance of addressing

these issues in Samburu County, Kenya, to ensure that girls' enrollment and access to education are not unduly hindered by inter-group conflicts.

When putting the variables together, the study finds that fear of attack has a close association with girls' school enrolment, as agreed by 82.1 per cent of the respondents. This is followed by loss of livelihood source (80.1%), loss of human lives (78.5%), learning disruption (77.6%), and displacement (72.2%).

The general Pearson Correlation Coefficient for inter-group conflict revealed a statistically significant moderate relationship between inter-group conflict and enrolment of girls in Samburu County, where the Pearson correlation coefficient was  $-.537$ , with the P-value being less than the  $.05$  alpha level. The coefficient ( $r$ ) was a moderate negative correlation, which means that an increase in inter-group conflict practice in Samburu County leads to a decrease in the enrollment of girls in the schools.

The results of the ANOVA performed on inter-group conflict and enrollment of girls in public primary schools also indicated the existence of a statistically significant negative relationship ( $\beta = -.572$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The beta coefficient of  $-.572$  means that when the practice of IGCF increases by an additional unit, enrollment of girls in public primary schools in Samburu County decreases by  $.572$ .

The qualitative results were in agreement with these statistics and even provided further information with regard to the problem of low girls' enrollment in public primary schools in Samburu County, as illustrated by the following statements:

*...livestock were raided, manyattas burned to the ground, and many families were forced to move away from their settlements. These conflicts displace girls with their families, which makes them go farther from school, reducing attendance and enrollment in schools.*

*Some schools have been destroyed completely, and the areas deserted. Families dispersed, and the commonality of close kins has been disrupted as each household goes its way.*

*There is a whole village now called Widows Village because men have been killed due to inter-group conflict. Women are left to hustle for their families.*

Similar to the empirical literature, the current study emphasises the adverse impact of frequent conflicts on girls' enrolment. Notably, this aligns with the findings of research conducted by Ochube (2022), which highlight that areas marked by frequent conflicts tend to experience a significant decline in girls' enrolment, with 85.0 per cent of respondents in the current study agreeing. This finding aligns with previous research, such as Education Above All (2022), which posits that inter-group conflicts can create a hostile environment that discourages families from sending their daughters to school for fear of attack. Save the Children (2022) mentions that inter-group conflicts cause the destruction of school infrastructure.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** Inter-group conflict factors such as displacement of families/teachers, fear of violence,

loss of livelihood source, loss of human lives, and learning disruption displacement have a significant relationship with enrolment of girls in rural public primary schools in Samburu County. Similarly, in some areas, inter-group conflict featured more in Samburu Central and North sub-counties than did in Samburu East.

**Recommendations:** Members of the public should be sensitised to change traditional beliefs and attitudes towards girls' education through community engagement and awareness-raising campaigns. This should include being made aware of the minimum age of marriage to ensure that girls complete their education before getting married. Additionally, discriminatory gender norms, early pregnancy and societal attitudes that prioritise boys' education are some of the key factors that limit girls' access to education and should be shunned. There is a need for broad-based research that will cover a bigger population and also include political, religious and psychological factors that relate to the enrolment of girls in public primary schools but were not considered in this study.

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