

**Factors Contributing to Gender Disparity in Public Primary Schools: A Case of Central Pokot Sub County, Kenya**

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**Abstract**

This article presents a qualitative report and analysis of the state of factors causing gender disparity in primary school education under the guidance of feminist theory. It discussed the enrolment in primary schools found in the central Pokot sub-county. It further discusses the present state of education in central Pokot, the retention figures in the chosen schools, and factors causing gender disparity in primary school education. The article was guided by feminist theory to discuss the present state of education in central Pokot, the retention figures in the chosen schools, and factors causing gender disparity in primary school education. The qualitative method was used to analyze data, compiled thematically and documented chronologically. It was revealed that the main factors that encourage gender disparity in access to early primary education are: early marriage and high bridewealth, insecurity, poverty, and high illiteracy, entertainment dances, gender roles, nomadic pastoralism, the Sapana traditional festival, and cattle rustling. The county government of West Pokot needs to mobilize all the powers and authority for the prevention and elimination of circumcision and early marriages of the girl child.

**Keywords:** Kenya, Gender, Disparity, Enrolment, Pokot, Primary School Education

## **Factors Contributing to Gender Disparity in Public Primary Schools: A Case of Central Pokot Sub County, Kenya**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

This article presents a qualitative report and analysis of the state of factors causing gender disparity in primary school education under the guidance of feminist theory. It starts by discussing the enrolment in primary schools found in the central Pokot sub-county. It discusses the present state of education in Central Pokot, the retention figures in the chosen schools, and factors causing gender disparity in primary school education. The overall purpose of this section is to highlight and understand the factors causing gender disparity.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Gender disparity in retention and completion of schooling continues to be a challenging issue for the education of the girl-child in marginalized communities such as the Pokot whose literacy level stands at a lower rate (23% against the national indicator which is 43% KBS from 2013 government of Kenya (GoK) report). The Kenyan government has made strides in expanding educational opportunities through free primary education since the year 2002, yet the retention of girls in primary schools continues to be low, a factor necessitating the inclusion of other stakeholders such as Faith Based Organizations (FBO). This illustrates a challenge to be addressed in Central Pokot Sub County in terms of retention and completion of primary education among girls yet the FBOs and non-governmental organizations have teamed up with the government on several initiatives. As a control measure of gender disparity, the GoK has enacted several legislative measures and policies. However, one wonders, if we have these wonderful initiatives, why is it that the rate of gender disparity is higher in marginalized areas compared to non-marginalized areas?

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The specific objective of this study was to investigate factors leading to gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub County, and thus answer the question: What factors have led to gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub County?

### **1.3 Enrolment in Early Primary Schools in Central Pokot Sub County**

Nduru (2013) points out that Kenya has implemented several policies to improve enrolment in primary education. However, the increase in the number of women and girls in education does not necessarily translate into the expected end of gender discrimination in education or gender equality. According to the records like the register, during the early stages of schooling in West Pokot, there is no significant difference between boys and girls from standard one to three in enrolment as seen in the table below. However, it was found that in Lokarkar and Central Pokot primary, the ratio of girls to boys is higher. This means that there is no gender disparity of girl child at the initial stages of school when the girl child is below ten

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years. Notably, girl-child problems begin to unfold in the adolescent stage after female circumcision. The following table shows the ratio of boys to girls in early primary school.

**Table 1.1: Sample of enrolment in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub County in classes 1-3 in the year 2011**

Primary school/Sponsor	Boys class				Girls class			
	Std 1	Std 2	Std 3	Total	Std1	Std 2	Std 3	Total
Central Pokot (ACK)	50	38	45	133	45	50	60	155
Runo (Catholic)	35	40	45	120	30	45	50	125
Lokarkar (AIC)	40	35	30	105	40	32	30	102
Masol (Catholic)	28	36	22	86	26	36	30	92
Marich (ACK)	25	34	21	80	24	22	24	70
WeiWei (Catholic)	42	27	36	105	35	30	36	101

**Source: Mwangi (2012)**

**Table 1.2: Retention Figures of Pupils in Primary Schools in Standard 1-3 in the year 2018**

Schools/ sponsor	Boys class				Girls class			
	Std 6	Std 7	Std 8	Total	Std 6	Std 7	Std 8	Total
Central Pokot (ACK)	40	28	40	108	10	12	12	34
Runo (Catholic)	30	40	44	114	15	10	15	40
Lokarkar (AIC)	42	34	25	101	12	14	12	36
Masol (Catholic)	30	34	28	92	8	10	8	26
Marich (ACK)	25	30	25	80	8	7	5	20
Wei (Catholic)	30	25	14	69	6	8	10	24

**Source: The West Pokot County Development Plan.**

The foregoing quantitative report shows that at the end of eight years, many girls dropped out of school due to cultural practices culminating in early marriage. It shows major changes as far as retention is concerned in comparison to the early stage of access when the number of girls was higher than that of boys. It was found through interviews that gender disparity came up as a result of girls dropping out of education for early marriage while boys continue with their education. The researcher found out that there are different treatments in terms of gender due to cultural beliefs in Pokot.

During an interview schedule, a key informer attributed that there was gender balance between boys and girls up to the age of adolescence when they undergo initiation the second rite

of passage after birth. The foregoing was because they are still young and unable to undergo the cultural rites of passage such as clitoridectomy at this point of their life (An interview with the chief, in November 2017). The foregoing persists despite Kenya's Anti-FGM Bill 2011 that criminalizes clitoridectomy age or status and banned the stigmatizing of a woman who has not undergone it. Further, the Act of Parliament NO. 32 of 2011 stipulates that it is illegal to aid someone to perform FGM or force someone into early marriage. Further, this is against the Marriage Bill that sets the mandatory minimum age for marriage at 18 irrespective of the customary tradition (Shahindul, 2015). The foregoing implies that despite the condemnation of FGM internationally and nationally, the Pokot Community has continued to embrace this practice. During one of the FGDs a member lamented;

I was 13 when I got pregnant, married, circumcised and divorced.' My husband dumped me because of the effects of FGM I developed a condition known as fistula, after the rite of passage. Afterwards, I developed problems during delivery leading to the death of her newborn baby. The foregoing conditions interfered with my education, social life and health condition (An interview with Lokarkar Headmistress on 17th November 2017).

In the same case, a Headteacher of a primary school in Central Pokot lamented that the cultural practice affects the schooling of these girls as they are forced to drop out of school to serve their households.

During the study, the researcher observed that genital mutilation affects girls' education directly since the ritual is performed during school days and healing takes a long period. Normally, girls between ages 9-14 are removed from school to undergo the procedure and later married. Further, it was noted that the initiation of girls made the initiates feel superior to their female teachers.

However, a Catholic Church evangelist of St Mary Central Pokot said FGM has been reduced due to efforts from World Vision to discourage the practice. Further explained that Catholic Faith-Based Organizations have programs discouraging FGM and although most people are aware of its effects, most of the Pokot practice it in secrecy in Central Pokot.

#### **1.4 Factors Causing Gender Disparity in Primary School Education**

This sub-section discusses the research findings on the socio-cultural and socio-economic factors that contribute to gender disparity in Central Pokot Sub County. 'Culture is a way of life which permeates all spheres of human beings; it is closely related to the values and belief systems of a given people. The section identifies entertainment dances, gender roles and expectations, nomadic pastoralism, circumcision of the Pokot girls, *sapana*, traditional dance, cattle rustling, early marriage and high bridewealth, insecurity, poverty and high illiteracy. One elder from Lokarkar interviewed stated;

The Pokot perceived formal education as watering down core cultural values which in turn would influence their lifestyle so they fear being influenced towards the Western culture (An interview with, J. Lomuria, on 15th Nov 2018).

This response was justified by the extent to which the Pokot are rooted down to cultural practices and beliefs more than education. In embracing the missionaries, the Pokot community was skeptical concerning education by missionaries.

The Pokot are a community that predominantly inhabits the north-western parts of Kenya, along the border with Uganda. They have a unique culture and socio-economic practices that have shaped their way of life over the centuries. In this essay, we will examine the various socio-economic factors that have influenced the Pokot community. The Pokots have a traditional pastoralist lifestyle, which is heavily reliant on their livestock (Chebitwey, 2016). They keep cattle, goats, and sheep and move from one area to another in search of pasture and water. As such, their economy is primarily driven by livestock rearing and trade. The sale of livestock and animal products such as hides, milk, and meat is their main source of income.

The Pokot people have also been involved in small-scale agriculture, particularly in the areas with more fertile land. They cultivate crops such as maize, beans, and millet, which provide food for their families and sell in local markets (Shahidul, 2015). However, as seen in chapter two, due to the frequent droughts and unpredictable weather patterns in the region, agriculture is often not reliable, and the Pokot people rely mostly on their livestock. In addition to their traditional economic activities, the Pokot people have also been involved in trade. They have a long history of trade with neighbouring communities, particularly Turkana, with whom they share a common language and cultural practices. The Pokot traded livestock, animal products, and other goods such as beads, skins, and honey with their neighbours.

The Pokot have a social structure that is based on age sets, which are groups of people who are born around the same time and go through life together. These age sets are important for social organization, as they determine the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the community. The age sets also serve as a form of social security, as members are expected to support each other in times of need. In terms of education, the Pokot people have been historically disadvantaged due to their remote location and traditional way of life (Wafula, 2018). However, there have been efforts to improve access to education in recent years, and there are now schools in some parts of Pokot. The literacy rate among the Pokot remains low, particularly among women.

### **1.5 Entertainment Dances**

A key respondent who is an H.O.D. in Masol primary complained that;

Night dances lead to many children not being able to attend school because of exhaustion. Further, parents do not see the value of education but rather consider it a waste of time in cases where children are used to herding cattle. In some cases, they fear that if the girls are educated, they may not get people to marry them (An interview with M. Lorupe, on 15th Nov. 2018).

The Pokot, a pastoralist community found in Kenya, have unique cultural practices that have been passed down through generations. Among these practices are night dances, which are viewed as a way of preserving their culture and promoting social cohesion. However, these night dances have negative consequences, particularly on the education of children in the community.

One of the major effects of night dances is that children are often too exhausted to attend school the next day (Adelakun, 2018). This leads to absenteeism and poor academic performance, which may ultimately result in children dropping out of school altogether. Furthermore, the Pokot community does not always see the value of formal education, with some parents regarding it as a waste of time. This attitude towards education is compounded by the fact that many children in the community are used to herding cattle and do not see the relevance of formal education. Another concerning issue is the reluctance of some parents to educate their daughters. Some parents fear that if their daughters are educated, they may not find suitable partners to marry. This demonstrates a cultural bias against educating girls, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting the potential of female members of the community.

The Pokot cultural practices, such as night dances, have both positive and negative impacts on their community. While these practices promote social cohesion and cultural preservation, they also negatively affect children's education, perpetuate gender inequality, and limit the potential of the community (Daily Nation, 2013). It is therefore important to strike a balance between preserving cultural practices and promoting education, especially for girls, to ensure that the Pokot community can thrive and succeed in the modern world.

### **1.6 Gender Roles**

The organization of the Pokot community in terms of labour is a crucial determinant of gender disparity. A respondent observed that;

A woman has no voice in any public and no authority within her homestead she is considered “foolish “like the cows that are being traded for her (An interview with D. Kudoo on 15th Nov. 2018).

Kudoo seems to imply that women among the Pokot are looked upon as inferior members of society. They occupy household chores such as building houses, taking care of the children, and searching for food. On the contrary, men spend their time in social gatherings socializing, basking in the sun and ensuring there is enough security.

The Pokot community is patriarchal men dominate all the social relations. In circumstances where women work, they are required to bring all their earnings to their husbands. During one of the Focus group discussions, a respondent revealed that;

Fathers make decisions on behalf of the whole family, and their decisions are final. In cases where fathers were convinced to abandon FGM and embrace religion, it was respected by the girls and mothers and no one questioned their authority while in cases where the father was absent or deceased, the eldest son always made decisions on behalf of the family (An interview with S. Koibei on 16th Nov. 2018).

The perceived superiority of the male gender in Pokot shows that women cannot make any decision concerning education and they are required to lie low. Many respondents agreed that this is the reason that contributes to gender disparity in schools because a girl child is dependent on the father's decision to take her to school or not. The finding concurs with

Somasekhar's (2017) study which observes that households have a negative attitude toward the education of girls which impedes the education of girls. Mothers favour the education of male children because they provide for them with old-age insurance. An informer in Central Pokot Sub County observed that;

In the informal sector of employment, women have made significant gains concerning their increased participation. Their work is unaccounted for in the family but there remain inadequate laws that do not eliminate all forms of discrimination against women's economic advancement. The majority of Pokot women are the primary producers of subsistence for families. Many women are working to produce food in farm activities, craft production and informal trade. For example, women provide the bulk of the workforce under challenging conditions to get food at the Weiwei Irrigation Scheme. The girl-child encounters many challenges from different dimensions; they are abused through child labour, circumcision and forced early marriages. Women bring all their earnings from manual work contracts to be subjected to their husbands' control and direction (An interview with M Jepkemoi on 16th Nov. 2018).

According to a study by Kimosop (2015) on spatial and gender inequality in primary education, preference persists for educating boys reflecting traditional limitations on women's roles, customary patrilineal inheritance systems and perceptions that boys will have greater prospects for modern sector employment. Moreover, in rural areas, the opportunity cost to parents of educating girls seems higher. Consequently, the gender roles that society assigns to its children will have a determining effect on their future such as schooling, labour force participation and status in relationships.

### **1.7 Nomadic Pastoralism**

It was revealed that some of the people in Pokot rely heavily on nomadism to search for pastures for their animals. Normally, nomadic pastoralism is an economic activity that requires vast land, and frequent movement of people and their animals from one place to the other in search of water and pasture. The practice of nomadic pastoralism does not only threaten peace between the Pokot and her neighbours but also with the settled farming communities (Luca, 2014). The pastoral nature of the Pokot community is a major challenge to education programmes and initiatives by the government. The land in Central Pokot is communal, which is best suited for grazing sheep, goats and cattle. Only indigenous animal species cope with the harsh climatic conditions because of the search for water and pasture. During pastoralism, the Pokot move with their belongings from one region to another in search of greener pastures.

During nomad-ism, schoolchildren are forced to drop out to migrate to another place with their families. During interviews, respondents explained that boys drop out of school to herd cattle while girls drop out to assist their mothers in domestic chores.

### **1.8 Rites of Passage**

Rites of passage in this case initiation revolve around social definitions of femininity and attitudes towards women's sexuality. Rites of passage in Pokot are performed at the request

of the family and to promote cultural identity. The practice is of great significance to the Pokot as it indicates a sense of loyalty to family, a value system that is mandatory among the Pokot community. The practice is meant to prepare adolescents for higher responsibilities in society that involve taking care of children and husbands for girls. After initiation, the initiates are secluded for a period that ranges from one to three months. During this period the initiates go through rigorous training on the community's values, beliefs and taboos of the community. One respondent explained that;

Immediately after circumcision, the girls are ready for marriage. Any man who can raise the required dowry of sixty cows and forty sheep and goats will be allowed to marry the girl. The Pokot allow polygamy therefore a rich man can marry many young girls as long as he can pay the bride wealth (An interview with M Jepkemoi on 16th Nov. 2018).

The findings from focus group discussions indicated that the Pokot prefer marrying their young girls than letting them attend school. The foregoing is supported by a study by Chebitwey (2016) who connects it to FGM; a practice that hampers advancement in education for girls since they are bogged down by rituals in the initiations rather than being engaged in education work. Concerning the foregoing, Adalakun (2018) while studying another region discovered that families in lower socio-economic structures tend to marry off their daughters for economic support through bridewealth, hence denying them an opportunity for education. However, it could not be understood well why some parents in West Pokot County could not see the fruits of education which were seen by more women competing with men in all sectors of the economy.

### **1.9 Sapana Traditional Festival**

*Sapana* is a traditional rite of passage that graduates and transfers young men into being elders in the Pokot community. Speaking on *Sapana*, a respondent stated that;

The function is very important to the community. The initiates spear a bull or he goat at sunrise and the raw blood from the animal is mixed with milk. The bull is not slaughtered but roasted and eaten directly, including its skin. Some blood and beer are sprinkled by elders on the initiate for cleansing in case the initiate may have committed any evil by commission or omission. During the ceremony, they pray to God for favour and blessing. *Sapana* has a spiritual implication: it is a way of worshipping and appeasing the ancestors (An interview with S Koibei on 16th Nov.2018).

From the foregoing, it can be seen that *Sapana* is a communal ceremony that involves a lot of feasting, singing and dancing. This festival is highly regarded; it is among the most sacred functions of the Pokot community. Interviews indicated that this communal ritual is all-inclusive as it involves elders, warriors, men, women and children since every community member has a role to play during the festival. Generally, the *Sapana* festival takes three months hence affecting school-going children who get absent from school to attend the ceremony. On explaining the



significance of the festival one respondent echoed:

During the function communities' core values are instilled in the children therefore after the festival is well regarded compared to the pursuit of education leading the youth into dropping out of school. During Sapana festivities everything in the community including schools is shut down in favour of the ceremony; because everybody will be rushing to the functions in the community (An interview on 16th Nov.2018).

The foregoing indicates that the Sapana cultural festivity holds a royal position in the life of Pokot in the Central Pokot division compared to formal education. *Sapana* is a very important rite of passage in which every member of the Pokot community yearns to participate. Consequently involvement in such derails and affects education in Central Pokot Sub County.

### **1.10 Cattle rustling**

The origin of cattle rustling among the Pokot stems from traditional beliefs about livestock as wealth. Those who successfully raid cattle are held as heroes. It is also held as a source for bridewealth payment for some while others get into the practice to generate money for *the Sapana* festival. Some conduct cattle rustling for fun as a 'cultural game' among the nomadic communities as it has been part of pastoralism culture for centuries. Most respondents seem to have taken it as a normal act despite it being a lawless act. It is good to note that most respondents were in agreement that cattle rustling was never done within the community among themselves but done to the non-Pokot. Surprisingly, the myths among the Pokot taught the community members that all cattle belong to them, whenever they go on raids, they claim to be an act of regaining what belonged to them- all cattle were given to them by Asis' Mainly, the acts of were blessed and sanctioned by the Pokot elders who often looked for some moral reasons to order the raid (Kimosop, Otiso & Ye, 2018). During interviews, one respondent retorted:

Cattle rustling is an acceptable cultural practice, we do not consider taking cattle from other communities to be a problem. This is because the Pokot believe that all the cattle on earth belong to them. Most importantly, higher status for Pokot men is achieved through raids, wars and fighting (An interview with D Kudoo on 15th Nov.2018).

It seems that the practice is held in high esteem and it is the wish of every Pokot man to achieve a higher status. However, during this study, it was noted that cattle rustling was not an easy task since some men died because of the regular wars to defend cattle during raids. In interviewing young men, most of them boldly raised their desire to conduct raids at one point in life or another. The desire per society's expected norm required every young man to work hard to ensure that they achieved their community's expectations.

Luca, (2014) observes that in nomadic communities just like the Pokot, a successful fighter is judged by the number of opponents he has killed, the number of animals he has raided and the ability to organize successful defence and attacks. Seemingly, the practice among the

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Pokot is not seen as negative compared to how it is interpreted and perceived by other communities. Despite it being a manly affair, women burst into songs and dances to encourage young men to prove their bravery and gain wealth by raiding for livestock.

On commenting about cattle rustling, a respondent retorted that;

The cattle rustling act is also a traditional commercial survival mechanism whereby nomadic pastoralists from arid and semi-arid areas restock their livestock after they die due to natural disasters such as acute drought. The act enabled Pokot to survive and maintain the household economy (An interview with S. Letuwo on 15th Nov. 2018).

The cattle rustling phenomenon is captured in the concept of ethnicity and identity of the Pokot community. In the midst of cattle rustling, a sizeable number of school-going children drop out of school. In most cases, interviews revealed that the Pokot view cattle rustling as a natural response to disaster and an attempt to increase yield and survival (Wasamba, 2005).

In addressing the issue of cattle rustling, a chief argued that;

Among the Pokot community, it is right and justified to kill, raid and evict the enemy communities. It is not a sin to kill an enemy but it is a duty and responsibility of each member of the community hence the honour one gets. Conflicts and fighting are enshrined in the communities' history and identity hence all other communities are described as vicious aggressors. Often, cattle rustling practice affects the education of girls because they would be victims of circumstances, with the available cows the men would marry off the girls in primary school (An interview with J. Lomuria 15th Nov. 2018)

The findings clearly show that it is another contributor to gender disparity in primary schools.

### **1.11 Early Marriage and High Bride Wealth**

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman as a husband and a wife. Marriage is legal among the Pokot from the age of eight for girls and extended to old age for men. The Pokot normally practise polygamy and women do not have any choice but to oppose arranged marriages. It is the pride of all women to be married as it is a way of ensuring the continuity of the community through procreation. An informant in Runo reported that;

Marriage in the Pokot community` is a rite of passage that takes place as soon as an individual has been circumcised. One is considered an adult and responsible member of the community. Girls as young as eight years get engaged to older men who can pay the bride price. It is expected that during seclusion girls learn all the responsibilities of motherhood and how to take care of a man and to fulfil all the duties of a woman' (An interview with S. Kokwo on 17th Nov.2018).

The foregoing indicates that the Pokot allowed early marriages. Generally, early marriage imposes negative effects on the early education of individuals, particularly girls. This

is because, when girls are married at a young age, they are deprived of the acquisition of education, getting engaged in formal employment opportunities, and enjoying participation in other childhood activities. They must stay in their homes, carry out household duties, and attend to the needs and requirements of their family members as a result of their marriage. This study found that although girls typically show resistance to obeying their parents, they are nonetheless expected to. Rural residents often marry off their daughters at a young age because they hold onto traditional beliefs and perspectives. It was realized that many parents fear that, if girls are educated and get older, then it would be difficult to find suitable grooms for them. For this purpose, they even train their girls in terms of implementation of household chores from the initial stage of their lives. Early marriage and high bride wealth have directly contributed to early marriages among young girls who in turn drop out of school in Pokot. Some men also lamented that educated women seemed to be unmanageable as wives. The foregoing point was disputed by women in FGDs with a claim that men suffered from an inferiority complex that arose due to the higher status acquired through formal education.

An elder interviewed further explained that;

The traditional marriage takes place at night and a lot of rituals are involved. The bride and the groom share milk from the same guard, both of them shave their hair and it is buried in the middle of the homestead by the master of ceremony after invocation of the community spirits and ancestors. The burial of the hair of the newly married couple symbolizes that their union is permanent and there is no thought of divorce.

A chief in Lomut pointed out that;

Payment of bride wealth before marriage is a mandatory requirement for a bridegroom. Bridewealth is given in the form of livestock (such as cattle, sheep and goats). The bride price is normally sixty heads of cattle and forty sheep and goats. The high bride price is among the reasons for cattle rustling by the young men. Those boys prefer to be involved in raids to get the required heads of cattle to cater for the bride price instead of going to school (An interview with S. Leduwo on 17th Nov. 2018).

The emphasis on the importance of marriage results in a low level of development in terms of lower primary school enrolment and a high drop-out rate. Instead of boys pursuing education, they utilize the available time to be involved in other activities to be able to get the required bride wealth.

A chief stated that;

The Pokot community believes in families; this implies that intervention that targets changing the Pokot culture should address the family as a social unit of change and in this case, the head of the family who is the father should be targeted` (S. Kokwo 17th Nov. 2018).

Focused group discussions revealed that; 'fathers make decisions on behalf of the whole family, and their decisions are final. The autocratic leadership among the men shows that key decisions regarding education and cultural practices in the Pokot community are among the factors causing gender disparity in education.

### **1.12 A sense of unease**

The researcher discovered that young boys help to strengthen security through a key informant. There is presently a fragile state of peace between the Pokot and Turkana communities. The Kenyan government deployed a lot of police to maintain this peace. This implies that when security is removed, violence will increase, which will have an impact on students' ability to learn (Dubel, 2018). Schools are frequently closed due to attacks by nearby communities or cattle rustling. Leaders of pastoralism are insecure because they lack political goodwill. *'Politicians do not emphasize the importance of education, but rather the importance of cattle bridewealth,'* he continues (E. Laktabai, 16 Nov. 2018).

According to the findings, the region's high levels of insecurity have a direct impact on student's academic growth. Because of the ongoing unrest, there is a chance for an arms race in the area, which increases the amount of illegally obtained lethal weapons in civilian hands. This has led to a security dilemma where various ethnic groups are unaware of the effects of their actions on others (Wasamba, 2005).

The F.G.D., it was revealed that *"insecurity originates from the weak state security structures that have given rise to a situation of anarchy, as each group provides for its security,"* (An interview with D Marich, 12/08/2022). Since Central Pokot Sub County is located on the border between Pokot and Turkana, there is a constant sense of unease, and every community is on high alert because they never know when their enemies will attack. People flee their homes due to insecurity, schools are temporarily closed, vacant medical facilities are left in place, and pastoralists are compelled to relocate to safer areas (Efevbera, 2017).

Further, a respondent argued that when explaining insecurity;

The lives of the schoolchildren are in danger during the raids because the parties are seeking retribution and may even shoot schoolchildren. Additionally, when conflict occurs, parents are compelled to move their families to a safer location Donald (2010). Children's education is negatively impacted by migration, particularly the education of girls, who spend less time in school. When safety and peace are restored, families return to their homes, but unfortunately, young girls are unable to do so because they must be circumcised between the ages of 11 and 14 before they can get married (Chongwony, 17th Nov. 2018).

The results highlight the detrimental effects of gender inequality in primary schools and how insecurity contributes to it.

### **1.13 Poverty**

The poverty rate in West Pokot County is 69 per cent, according to the KNBS and Population the long-lasting drought in Central Pokot Sub County, which leads to famine, is blamed for this. Numerous domestic animals are frequently wiped out by the ongoing drought,

leaving people without any other viable sources of income (Fletcher, 2017). This worsens the poverty, leaving the community with no other option for surviving besides resorting to raids and stealing to obtain animals for restocking and selling to purchase food. West Pokot County is one of those supported by the Government of Kenya (GOK) and other donors, including the World Food Program (WFP) and Food for Work (FFW) relief programs, as a result of the widespread drought and poverty experienced in Central Pokot.

The researcher noted that the climate in Central Pokot Sub County is hostile and harsh, making it unsuitable for crop planting. The land could accomplish wonders if the government provided water. Only traditional breeds of sheep and cattle can survive. The only means of subsistence, according to an elder in Runo, is a pastoral lifestyle (Flick, 2015). They thus prefer to focus their limited resources on the education of boys. When a girl gets married, but not when she pursues education, she is viewed in terms of her economic value. The 60 cows, 40 sheep, and 40 goats that make up the dowry are eagerly anticipated by the parents. They see it as a waste of the small family resources to spend on the girl when she will eventually marry someone from a different family. However, some parents in the FGDs were positive about the provision of formal education as they saw it as a way of increasing bride wealth.

The majority of the Pokot community's elites received their education through the sponsorship of missionaries, who also provided for all of their other basic needs from elementary school through college. The Pokot community still relies on well-wishers to fund education. Free primary education isn't free because students still have to pay for things like uniforms and exam fees (Kimosop, 2015). Prof. Lonyangapuo, the former governor of West Pokot County, made an effort to inspire the locals by awarding full and partial scholarships to university students. An elder in Runo observed that.

The girls in the Central Pokot division lack role models.” People who are educated and have renounced cultural customs do not get married. For instance, the parents of their daughters discourage them from being like the world marathon Tecla Lorupe because she is very intelligent but not married (M. Jepkemoi, 16th Nov. 2018).

The results demonstrate that a lack of role models and extreme poverty have contributed to a decline in academic performance in the study area, resulting in gender disparities in primary schools. People who live in poverty face a variety of difficulties and obstacles when trying to make ends meet. They occasionally have trouble getting the necessary nutrition each day (Narayan, 2014). The main goal of those living in poverty is to make enough money to maintain their standard of living. They have insufficient financial means necessary to cover the costs of pursuing an education. Although education is free, those who live in poverty have trouble paying for stationery items like books, bags, uniforms, transportation costs, and other costs associated with education (Psaki, 2016). It was alleged that the poor hold the opinion that sons should receive an education so they can pursue rewarding careers in the future. Girls, on the other hand, receive training in how to carry out household duties and minor jobs so they can support their families financially.

### **1.13 High Illiteracy Level**

The main cause of illiteracy in West Pokot County's Central Pokot Sub County is negative cultural practices. Due to the high illiteracy level, it seems that finding and choosing alternative sources of income like farming, entrepreneurship, and both formal and informal employment is difficult (Otiato, 2016). Generally, since illiteracy impedes all forms of development, it makes illiterate people more susceptible to conflicts and violent crimes. This means that, without good formal education, young community members' socialization is only focused on the community's defensive and offensive roles. It was revealed that the majority of West Pokot County, particularly in the northern arid and semi-arid region, has a high illiteracy rate of up to 80%. An elderly Lokarkar resident affirmed that in some incidents people bribed the chief for children to be excused from attending school; an allegation which the chief denied. The foregoing is an indication of how the gender gap problem is being made worse by the perceived illiterate. An elder in Lomut retorted.

Education isolates youth from their surroundings and the community". Their chance to learn about cultural customs and practices is thus lost. However, since interactions lead to the development of harmonious relationships, the fact that students have the chance to interact with members of various communities gives them the chance to learn to respect one another (Interview with S. Kokwo on November 17, 2017). 2018).

From the foregoing statement, it seems that some people in West Pokot are against formal education. Most respondents retorted that there are numerous cases of some families opposing the exposure of their children to formal education. This means that the Kenyan government's effort to implement free primary education hasn't had a fully expected impact (Mwaura, 2013). The foregoing has not been achieved despite the government heavily investing in free primary education by lessening the burden of fees. Consequently, the study recommends that the county government and the national government should gear more efforts to promote access to education for all. They should also invest in infrastructure, security, and food security to enable schools to run effectively.

### **1.15 Conclusion**

This article was guided by the feminist theory to discuss the present state of education in Central Pokot, the retention figures in the chosen schools and factors causing gender disparity in primary school education. The paper revealed that the main factors that encourage gender disparity in access to early primary education are: early marriage and high bridewealth, insecurity, poverty, and high illiteracy, entertainment dances, gender roles, nomadic pastoralism, the Sapana traditional festival, and cattle rustling.

### **1.16 Recommendations**

The paper recommends that challenges facing the FBOs and the GoK in addressing gender disparity in Central Pokot Sub County can be minimized by implementing anti-discrimination policies. As there are programs intended to minimize gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub County, more funds should be allocated to Faith-Based

Organizations and the Kenyan government. The government is the most important stakeholder in all efforts aimed at ending the gender disparity of the girl child in primary education. As the only legitimate and legal custodian of all public interest and education, the county government of West Pokot needs to mobilize all the powers and authority for the prevention and elimination of circumcision and early marriages of the girl child. There are several cultural impediments to gender equity in Pokot County. The government should provide security for the girl-child and charge and take stern action against the parents who force their children to go through circumcision. Heavy penalties and dire consequences should be faced by the parents who let their children drop out of school only to be married.

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