

Effect of Socio-Cultural Practices on Girl-Child Performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Examination in Navakholo Sub- County, Kenya

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Abstract- Over the past five years, Girls performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) Examination in primary schools in Navakholo Sub-County has been dismal. Poor KCPE performance hinders placement of girls in National Schools, quality extra County schools and by extension, admission for good professional careers. The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of socio cultural practices on girl child KCPE examination performance in primary schools in Navakholo Sub-County. This was a descriptive study that employed a mixed methods designs approach. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 360 standard eight girls recruited through Stratified Random sampling. Interview guides were used to collect data from 15 Key Informants and 6 Focus groups purposively selected. Quantitative data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS computer software program. Qualitative data was analysed by content analysis. The study established that stereotypic gender role dispositions are the major socio cultural factors that lead to girls' poor performance in KCPE Examination. The study recommends that parents be encouraged to minimize domestic chores for girls, and that Policy decisions should focus on increase Free Primary Education Funds to so that schools' can cater for girls needs as well to enhance girl child KCPE Examination performance.

Index Terms- Socio cultural practices, stereotypic gender role dispositions Girl- Child, Performance, KCPE Examination

I. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, there is still a problem of [gender equality in access, retention and transition in education](#) (UNESCO, 2010). This problem is severe in developing nations partly because of limited resources to meet all budgetary requirements for education. In the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Lewin, & Sabates (2011) have reported that girls are now enrolling in schools more than the past, but still, more girls drop out and do not progress to complete education because of poor performances in national examinations at the end of the primary school cycle. According to UNESCO (2008), the Education for All (EFA) goals commitments to girls' education go beyond the primary education; and Education for All means quality education, and more access to secondary and post-secondary education, with gender equality.

Girls are less likely than boys to complete the first schooling cycle, particularly in South Asian countries, where the primary completion rate is estimated at 84 per cent for boys and only 63 per cent for girls; and sub-Saharan Africa, where the primary school completion rate is 56 per cent for boys and 46 per cent for girls (Levine and Birdsall, 2010). It has also been estimated that less than 15 per cent of girls from rural households in Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Niger complete primary school (Lewin & Sabates, 2011). In Pakistan in the late 1990s, only 36 per cent of rural girls were attending primary school and 16 per cent secondary school (Levine and Birdsall, 2010).

There are several reasons for girl's non completion of primary school education. Studies identify reasons as disadvantaged groups such as children living in poor communities, children on wage labor and orphaned children as most vulnerable to poor attendance, repetition, early dropout and exclusion (Ngware *et al*, 2012). In the developing countries, these factors have been isolated as School-related factors (ineffective teaching, insufficient qualification of teacher, absence of textbooks and inappropriate learning assessment system), Student characteristics (poor motivation, learning difficulties, health and nutrition status, and behavioral problems) and Family-related factors (illiteracy or low education of parents, income of family) (Sabates *et al*, 2011).

In Kenya, Basic Education is now a right in the current Constitution of Kenya (GOK, 2010). The Constitution provides for children's right to free and compulsory basic education. Other notable reform initiatives in education by the GOK include provision of Free Primary Education (Malenya, 2008), legislation through the Children's Act (GOK, 2001) and the formulation of the gender policy in Education (GOK, 2008). Despite progress made over the last decade towards completion rates and gender parity, the Ministry of Education (MOE) reports indicate that there are still some challenges (MOE, 2011; 2010; 2009). One major challenge to completion of girl child basic education has been the poor performance and failure in National examinations and this hinders the transition of girls to higher levels of learning particularly from primary school.

The Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) Examination has been used to measure academic achievement after completion of primary school since the year 1985. KCPE has five examinable subjects including Science, Mathematics, Kiswahili, Social studies and English. These subjects are scored equally out of a total of 500 marks. Secondary school placement,

and to some extent admission, depend on performance in KCPE (Oketch, 2010). In effect, KCPE is used as a basis for selection for educational advancement and by extension, future career and employment. KCPE is a summative assessment and does not adequately measure all learner abilities and experiences. School based assessment would be better, but it is still not standardized and is therefore less useful as a measure to be used for transition to secondary education.

Variations in KCPE Examination performance are sometimes due to unique factors that affect specific regions (KNEC, 2010). Consequently, reliance on KCPE scores for transition leads to tragic wastage of human, social and economic potential in Kenya. In some cases bright students have failed to excel in KCPE while weak students have excelled because of certain factors (Jagero, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of Socio-cultural practices on girl child KCPE performance in Navakholo Sub-County in Kenya. Over the past five years (2009-2013), girls in Navakholo Sub County have been performing poorly in KCPE. In the year 2013, 67% of the Girls scored less than half (250 marks out of the possible 500 marks) in KCPE as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: A summary of KCPE Performance in public primary schools Navakholo

Sub-County by Gender over the period 2008-2013

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Percentage of Boy's who scored at least 250 out of the possible 500 KCPE marks.	45%	49.6%	49.9%	52%	51.6%
Percentage of Girl's who scored at least 250 out of the possible 500 KCPE marks.	38%	39.5%	39%	38.4%	33%

(Source: Sub County Education office, Kakamega Central Sub County, 2013).

Navakholo Sub County is in Western Kenya. It is one of the twelve Sub Counties that make up Kakamega County. Navakholo Sub County an overtly rural settlement. The inhabitants of the Navakholo are mainly the Luhya ethnic group. The major economic activities in the study area are agriculture, Jua Kali artistry, hawking, businesses etc. Farming of food crops is done mainly to sustain livelihoods. The major stable food crops grown are maize, beans, and cassava. Sugarcane is grown for commercial purposes. Residents also keep livestock including cattle, sheep, goats and local chickens (Kakamega County Data Sheets-K.C.D.S., 2012).

The gender disparity in KCPE Examination performance in primary schools in Navakholo sub-county where boys and girls learn under the same school environment is questionable. Ideally, girls should attain almost the same scores of marks as the boys. Poor performance in KCPE examinations negatively

affects secondary school placement because Girls in Navakholo Sub County miss out placement in National schools, good Extra County schools and by extension, future career opportunities. Previous studies have reported that barriers to full and equal access to, and achievement in basic education for the girl child include hardships in environments that are not learner friendly, cultural factors like early marriage and female genital mutilation, lack of role models, sexual harassments, poor school management practices, poor attitude of girls towards mathematics and science subjects, and school location (Oketch & Somerset, 2010). Since the boys and girls learn under the same school environment, the assumption of the study was that factors out of school could be the major cause of the gender disparity in KCPE performance in primary schools in Navakholo sub-county. Moreover, in one recent study, Achoka *et al* (2013) reported that the cultural forces, mainly traditional practices, negatively influencing girls' academic achievement in Western Kenya include early marriages, stereotypic gender role disposition and Female Genital mutilation. A clear identification and understanding of how sociocultural factors influence KCPE examination performance in Navakholo Sub County will contribute invaluable information for the design and implementation intervention strategies to help improve girl child KCPE performance. Ultimately, the girl child will be able to compete favorably in the job market and improve in the quality of life.

II. METHODS

This was a descriptive survey study with a mixed methods approach. Both Quantitative and Qualitative approaches were adopted since the nature of data required and the procedures of analysis involved integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, merging and connecting to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). The designs were considered suitable to evaluate Socio cultural practices and behavior patterns of the community, parents and the girls regarding girl child academic performance in primary schools in Navakholo.

A sample of the standard eight girl pupils in primary schools was recruited using stratified random sampling. The strata were based on the kind of school shared attributes or characteristics of either public or private. Of the 74 primary schools, 66 were public schools and 8 were private. Thus, the proportion was 89.2% Public primary schools to 10.8 % private primary schools. A random sample from each stratum was taken in a number proportional to the stratum's size when compared to the population estimates. Subsets of randomly selected standard eight girl pupils from the different strata were then pooled to form a random sample of 360 standard eight girls. 15 Key informants were purposively selected based on their knowledge and experiences on issues related to socio cultural practices affecting the girl-child in Navakholo (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary information on the sample size used in the research study

Respondents	Method of recruitment	Number of respondents recruited
Standard eight Girls	Stratified random sampling	360
Key informants	Purposive	15
Focus Groups	Purposive	6 groups of 6-8 girls

Source, Field Data

Prior to actual data collection, the instruments pre-tested with the help of Experts from Mount Kenya University School of Education and four trained research assistants during the month of September, 2014. The research study was approved by Kenya National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) vide a research permit (Ref. NACOSTI/P/14/7592/3931).

Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the standard eight girls during the first three weeks of October, 2014. The questionnaires were completed with the assistance of research assistants, lasting about Forty Five minutes. Six (6) Focus Groups Discussions were also conducted with standard eight for one hour discussions captured through group discussion and worksheet analysis. Key informant interviews lasting about One and a half hours were conducted during the last week of October, 2014 with the help of research assistants.

Quantitative data obtained was coded, cleaned and analyzed using SPSS version 17 computer software program. The data is summarized and presented in form of Narratives, tables and figures showing descriptive statistics for each variable. Analysis was by determining the percentages of girls who engage in socio cultural role duties and the frequency with which they undertake

the sociocultural role duties within a week. Chi-square test analysis was used to assess for statistically significant associations between variables. The Key informant interview responses were thoroughly read and scrutinized for patterns; the study sought views on the challenges girls face from socio cultural beliefs and role duties. Data was then transcribed and analyzed for content manually using a meaning centered approach to derive key Themes. Findings from both arms are used complementarily.

III. STUDY FINDINGS

It was observed that the age of girls mainly ranged between 13-18 years but was skewed towards the range 13-16 years (Mean age = 14.4 years: ± 1.2 S.D.). Most girls (> 90%) reside near their schools (within 1-2Km). School levies are mainly paid by their parents. Only a few parents (about 11%) to the girls had beyond form four level of education. Most parents (>80%) were not in formal employment (Table 3).

Table 3: Socio Demographic Characteristics of the Sample population

VARIABLE	COUNT	FREQUENCY
AGE (COMPLETED YEARS)		
13-14 YEARS	214	59.44%
15-16 YEARS	126	35.00%
17-18 YEARS	18	0.050%
ABOVE 18 YEARS	2	0.006%
TOTALS	360	100%
DISTANCE FROM SCHOOL TO HOME (Km).		
Within 2 Km	330	91.6%
3-5 Km	15	4.2%
Above 5 Km	15	4.2%
TOTALS	360	100%
PERSON WHO PAYS SCHOOL LEVIES		
Parents	300	83.33%
Brother/Sister	10	2.7%
Other relative	18	5.0%
Sponsor/ Guardian	22	6.10%
TOTALS	360	100%
LEVEL EDUCATION OF PARENT/GUARDIAN		
Below standard 8	10	2.7%
KCPE/Standard 8	270	75.0%
O level / Form 4	40	11.1%
Diploma	20	5.5 %
Degree/Undergraduate.	15	4.2%
Post Graduate	5	1.3%
TOTALS	360	100%
PARENT'S /GUARDIAN'S OCCUPATION		
Farmer	240	66.6%
Business/ Jua kali/ Hawker	50	13.9%
Temporary/ Informal / Contracts	10	2.7%
Permanent/ Formal	60	16.7%
TOTALS	360	100%

Source, Field Data, 2014

Influence of socio- cultural practices on girl child KCPE performance

Socio cultural practices reported in the study area are normally manifested through socio-cultural role duties which are stereotypic. These included fetching water, taking care of children, looking after cattle, preparing the farm, preparing meals, being sent to the market, milking cow(s) and domestic chores such as sweeping, baby sitting and washing Clothes.

It was observed that preparing meals and fetching water were the most frequent socio cultural role duties performed by girls (>95%), while milking cows and looking after the cattle were the least performed sociocultural role duties (Table 4). The girls reported that most of these sociocultural role duties were undertaken after school time (After 4.00Pm).

Table 4: Weekly rating on number of times socio-cultural role duties are undertaken by the girl child (n=330)

Socio-Cultural role duty	Percentage of girls who undertake duty	Weekly Mean rating (number of times)
1. Fetching water	95.2%	4.8
2. Fetching firewood	61.3%	2.0
3. Taking care of children	28.5%	2.0
4. Looking after cattle	3.7%	0.1
5. Preparing the farm	45.0%	0.8
6. Preparing meals	97.2%	4.87
7. Being sent to the market	39.8%	2.0
8. Milking cow(s)	3.6 %	0.1
9. Domestic chores such as Sweeping, Baby sitting and Washing Clothes	68.4%	3.2

Source: Field Data, (2014)

Challenges due socio-cultural role duties

The greatest challenges that face girls are activities at home which deny them a chance to study (95%), being given too much work at home (93.1%), parents attitude that girls do not require as much education as boys (78%) and the feeling that boys are better than girls when it comes to academic work (Table 5). This finding was also consistent with teachers' views during interviews. Teachers were of the view that domestic chores seriously interfered with girls' concentration on school work and enhanced girls' flight from academics, particularly the weak pupils. Girls also confirmed that activities at home, particularly domestic duties were the biggest challenge they faced. As one of the girl respondent remarked in desperation;

I know I need time to rest and read, but I have fear of how my family members would look at me if I refuse to carry out these tasks (domestic chores). They all know that these are duties for a girl. I have never seen in any home around where girls just sit

unless they are spoilt or are girls from town who do not know how to cook and sweep the house. [Focus Group summary note]

The Education officers interviewed also submitted that due to poverty, parents in Navakholo Sub County engage their daughters in labor such as house-helps or working on peoples farms in order to lessen the financial burden on the family. All head teachers interviewed, said some girl pupils are asked by their parents to quit school during some time (particularly the planting seasons of January to February and help them with planting and household chores, but some often fall prey large number of idle young leading to un intended pregnancies and drop out of schools. During the FGDs, girls suggested that standard 6, 7 and 8 girls should board in schools to reduce the burden of activities and to give girls ample time to concentrate on their studies.

Table 5: Frequency of challenges on performance of the girl child in KCPE (n=340)

Challenge	Always	sometimes	rarely	Never
1. Parents delay/ do not pay school levies	2.9%	60%	26%	11.1%
2. Parents failure to buy me certain basic items	5%	60%	25%	10%
3. I am given too much work at home compared to boys	93.1%	4%	2%	0.9%
4. Activities at home deny me study time besides leaving me fatigued	95%	2%	1%	1%
5. Parents view has been that I do not require as much education as boys	78%	12.3%	3.7 %	6%
6. Parents feeling that I should marry after class eight	3%	68%	10%	19%
7. Parents feeling that Boys are better than girls when It comes to academic work	71.9%	11%	16.1%	4.0%

Source: Field Data, (2014)

This study findings corroborate with findings of a study by Juma *et al*, (2014) who found that girls are normally overburdened with family and household chores and thus do not enjoy plenty of time to study and freedom to choose what to engage in. This finally leads to poor academic performance in examinations such as the KCPE examination.

However, parents were not ignorant of the potential harm of their attitudes towards girls. One mother noted, for example, that they do not give girls the same freedom they give to boys because girls are more vulnerable and more dependent and lack confidence in themselves and their education. During this study, a father suggested that parents control girls through lots of domestic chores for their own good: he also argued that, although girl's responsibilities were numerous, the tasks undertaken require less energy. The respondent further asserted that:

If the girl is not controlled, she will lose her virginity and even get pregnant. A boy has nothing to lose. Girls normally are victims and are also afraid. [Male Key informant Observation] Another key finding was that parents tended to discourage too much education for their daughters. There is always the fear that if a girl is highly educated she may find it difficult to get a husband or be a good wife. They argue that women stay away from too much education in order to remain manageable and to avoid entering fields, which would make it difficult to follow their husbands in case of transfer of residence. This perhaps explains why most parent's (>90%) have their daughters

educated in schools near to their homes (less than 2 Km away) so that they do not only cover long journeys to school but also, so that they can be monitored.

Parents interviewed complained that sending a girl to school is expensive because most of them depend on farming for their livelihood. This fact is further supported by data on parents'/ guardians' occupation. A Chi Square test conducted on the distribution of parents'/ guardians' occupation data showed that there was a highly significant ($p<0.01$) variation ($\chi^2_{3,0.01} = 348.89$). The situation is made worse when occupation for most parents is that most are peasant subsistence farmers.

When the girls were asked how they expected to score in KCPE, only 9.1 % of the girls perceived themselves as being able to score above 350 marks (Table 6). A Chi Square test conducted on the data showed that there was a highly significant ($p<0.01$) variation in the distribution of perceived marks to be scored by ($\chi^2_{3,0.01} = 774.07$). This finding points at girl's low self-efficacy and low esteem. A similar pattern of low self efficacy was observed when the girls were asked their preferred career choice of the future. Less than 10 (<2%) girls aspired to be either doctors or engineers; majority (>70%) wanted to be nurses (Figure 3).

Table 6: Projected KCPE marks to be scored by girls (n=360)

PROJECTED MARKS TO BE SCORED BY GIRLS IN KCPE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
250-280 marks	11	3.05%
281-300 marks	10	2.7%
301-350 marks	316	87.8%
Above 350 marks	33	9.1%
TOTALS	360	100%

Source: Field Data

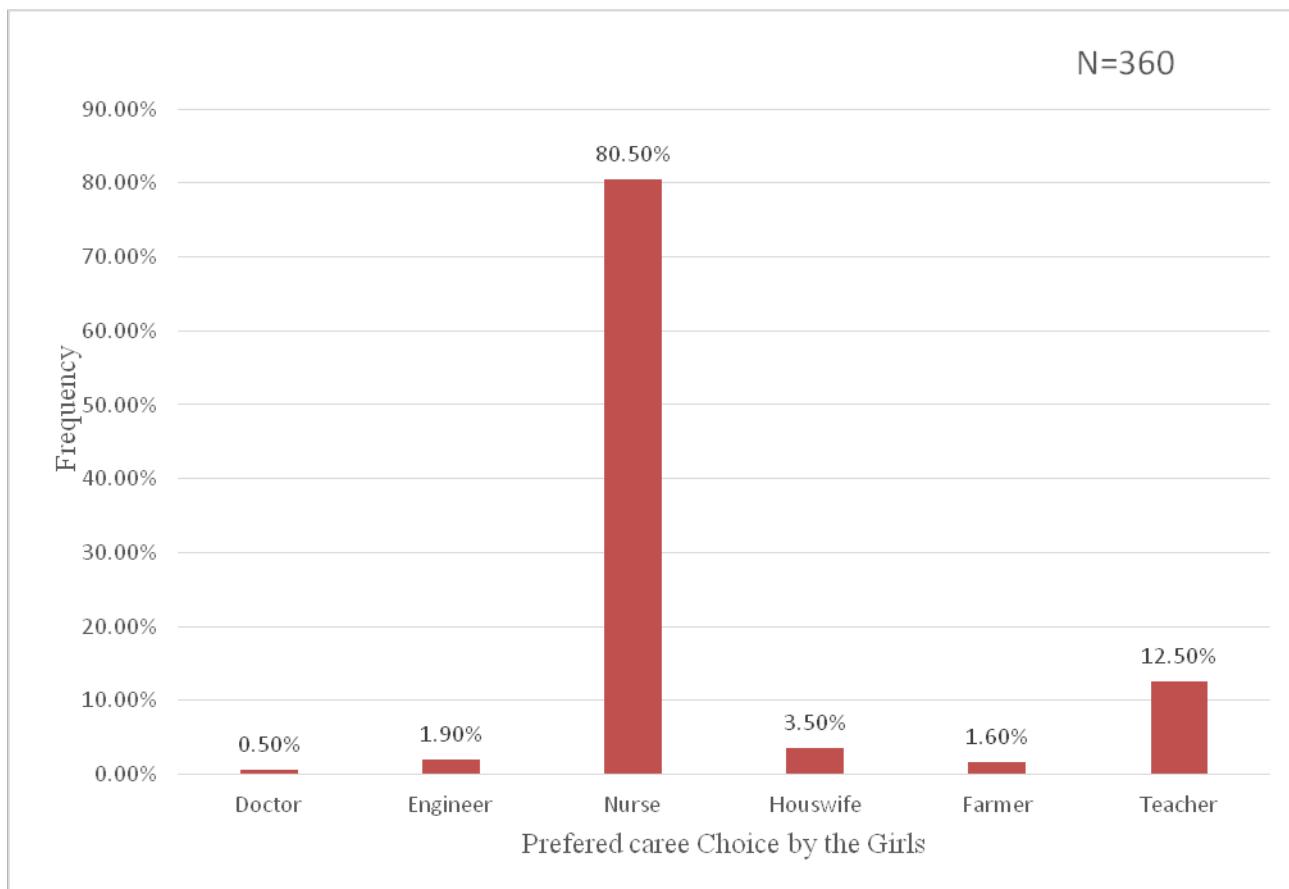


Figure 3: Girl' Preferred Future career choice

IV. DISCUSSION

The pattern of mean weekly ratings results on socio-cultural role duties undertaken by the girls suggest that most girls fetch water and prepare meals virtually every day of the school week. It is also possible that the girls could be involved in more than one sociocultural role duties within a single day and within the week. These socio-cultural role duty activities are likely to have an impact on the girl child's academic performance in school, because, besides leaving the girls exhausted, such sociocultural role duties can take much of the time required for revision and study. This argument is in line with the findings of Kiptui and Mbugua (2009) who established that a lot of work at home was one of the problems affecting girl-students' KCSE achievement in English in day schools in Kerio Valley, Kenya. In Kerio Valley, the chores included cleaning the home, working on family farm or business, cooking and taking care of the young ones among others.

Girls engage in these sociocultural role duties mainly because of the patriarchal nature of the society where the cultural perception is that the women, and in this case girls, should be the ones to carry out such domestic duties related to keeping the home (Mutambo, 2013). As cultural norms, stories are told to facilitate the telling of the young girls' expected experiences and stories enable them to explore their experiences in working so hard in carrying domestic chores and to be good mothers. Such household chores and other 'community' perceptions keep girls out of school and divert their attention from learning.

Listening to these young 'mothers' diverse narratives and in reinterpreting them within the broader social and cultural landscape leaves one with a perception of the girls are overburdened but have no place in society to complain. As one of the girl respondent remarked in desperation;

I know I need time to rest and read, but I have fear of how my family members would look at me if I refuse to carry out these tasks (domestic chores). They all know that these are duties for a girl. I have never seen in any home around where girls just sit unless they are spoilt or are girls from town who do not know how to cook and sweep the house.

This assertion implies that the Socio cultural practices have been inculcated into the girls such that the practices are part of their daily lives. Similar study findings have been reported by Achoka, *et al* (2013) in Bungoma County, also established that the stereotypic gender role dispositions tended to favor male children against girls, hence girls are given so much work at home that they can hardly find time to read.

Findings of this study reveal great interference from socio-cultural practices on the girl child academic performance which concurs with findings of studies by UNESCO (2010) & Batoya *et al*, (2013), which have reported that there was a general trend across all countries which reported on the matter in which girl Child academic performance appears to weaken relative to the performance of boys at some point in the school cycle; for example, in Botswana performance by female starts to decline at the age of ten years, while in Madagascar and Rwanda

girls performance weakens at the age of thirteen years and nine years respectively. Girls often become victims of circumstances. In Navakholo Sub County, domestic chores undertaken by girls are a reflection of the community's expectations. The gender division of labor is also a reflection of the overall community's expectations of gender roles. The significant contribution that girls make to household, preparing food, cooking, fetching water, looking after siblings sometimes hinders girls from concentrating at school. This societal perception leads to overburdening girls with domestic chores leaving them with little study time. However, this could sometimes be due to low income, where the parents cannot afford to pay for the services of house helps. However, it appeared that parents were also scared of the delicate nature of their girl children.

Another significant finding is the 'preference' of boys which often ends up disadvantaging girls. Patriarchal societies such as that of Navakholo are influenced by patriarchal systems, which give preferences for investment in schooling to boys who are believed to retain responsibility for their parents when they grow older, compared to girls, who are incorporated into their husbands' families. According to head teachers, socio cultural impediments do provide girls with less exposure to the information that allows individuals to develop self-efficacy hence it make girls loose morale for school since girls would traditionally depend on men. This also could perhaps explain why most girls preferred to be nurses! This findings concur with those of Juma *et al*, (2014) in a study of cultural factors affecting academic achievement in Kisumu East, Kenya, where it was reported that some girls believed that their success and future depended on the success of their husbands and therefore it was used as an excuse for girls not to be taken to school. This is likely to have a negative effect on the academic performance of the girls. This perhaps explains why most parents would prefer to invest in boys and give girls less education. However this unfortunate situation coupled with poverty leads to girls sometimes failure to get basic needs which ultimately lead to poor academic performance. As one Head Teacher put it:

When basic needs are fulfilled, girls' performance becomes one of the top priorities'.

During interviews with teachers, it emerged that fulfillment of basic needs supports the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable girls to increase their concentration and improve their academic prowess. This finding is supported with findings of another study by Juma, simatwa &Ayodo (2011) which established that girls whose parents do not provide basic needs such as sanitary towels totally lose concentration in academic work and become more vulnerable to sexual abuse in order to fend for themselves.

Socio- cultural practices lead to girl's low self-esteem and could have also an impact on parent's perceptions of their daughters' abilities. Although many parents recognized that the poor performance of girls was related to their work burden in the home, others were not convinced of this and considered it to be a natural phenomenon. For example, one parent proposed that enrolment is higher for boys in secondary schools because they have greater aspirations, since girls are usually only interested in their work in the house and marriage. The parent added that girls are therefore less interested in school and make less effort to join secondary school and, as a result, parents send boys to better

secondary schools. However, this view was not supported by girls themselves, who, expressed a desire to continue to high school and obtain professional employment as reflected by the collected data.

Girls' low levels of achievement over the past few years, in comparison to boys, could also contribute to parents feeling that the time girls spend in school is wasted. Although most girls (>90%) indicated that they would consider their education complete after attaining university education (degree level), to some extend the girls have also perceived their self-efficacy poorly. This finding also points at poor self-efficacy by the girls about. People's beliefs about their abilities where domains are thought to be important in motivating them to do, and what they can do to achieve (Hawthorne, 2004). Self-efficacy - defined as confidence in one's abilities to successfully perform particular tasks appeared to be low in the girls because very few of them see their ability as only being able to achieve careers in nursing and teaching. This finding could be a reflection of lack of role models in these professional careers, lack of career counselling services and also because of the cultural deposition on the common female gendered role careers. The finding could also be a reflection of the parents and cultural perceptions on career choice for women. Such poor self-efficacy would make girls less ambitious and limit their education to achieve certain careers in education, and perhaps that is why most of them perceive themselves as only being able to be nurses or teachers and not Doctors or Engineers

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study established that Socio Cultural stereotypic gender role dispositions are the major socio cultural factors that lead to girls' underperformance in KCPE Examinations. Socio Cultural factors in almost all circumstances depict girls as inferior to boys, a factor that demeans girls and indeed impedes girls' aspirations in life. Girls even fail to consider education as the best investment in good life free from poverty, slavery, ignorance and diseases. The consequence of which is laxity and negative attitude towards education. This lowers girls' morale and eventually leads to low academic performance including KCPE examination performance. The study recommends that parents be encouraged to minimize domestic chores for girls, so that they can concentrate on their studies. This would ensure that the girls have adequate time to carry out their studies. Policy decisions should focus on increasing Free Primary Education Funds to so that schools' can cater for girls needs as well to enhance academic achievement

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