

SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S
EDUCATION AND THE RELATED PROCESS
OF GENDER DISPARITY: A CASE STUDY OF
KAKAMEGA, KENYA

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Caroline Cowan

ABSTRACT

This research project aims to identify which aspect of society in Kakamega, Kenya, wields the most influence over perceptions of women's education. Through conducting primary research in the form of surveys, interviews, and focus groups, this research determines what most affects a parent's decision to send a daughter to school. The findings reveal a dynamic process of social factors at work that create the condition of Kakamega. This process entails two opposing ideological forces, traditional thought and progressive reform, converging in an environmental context of financial stress and health disadvantages. Early marriage is both at the crux of this process and also a byproduct of the process. Trapping girls in a nearly inescapable cycle of low educational attainment and early marriage, the condition of Kakamega is undergoing transformation. Despite the presence of traditional ideologies and this repressive cycle, women's empowerment groups and progressive reformative efforts are palpable signs of hope and change for gender parity and for the girls of Kakamega, Kenya.

“The educated women can do a lot of work, equivalent with men. They can lead, they can work in high places. The women are empowered they can also make their own decisions in life. Educating a girl educates the nation.”

THANK YOU

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“[Educated women] are a source of inspiration in the society. For a long time, women have been despiced [sic] in society and treated as slaves. But for the educated women, they prove that the work of a women [sic] is not just in the kitchen but they’ve got brains and also the guts to stand for their rights. To me, they are a big challenge and also an encouragement.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

<u>Introduction</u>	5
<u>Research Questions</u>	8
<u>Literature Review</u>	8
Trends in Global, Regional, and National Disparities in Education	9
Case Studies	11
Importance of Educating Women	13
Inhibitors to Gender Parity in Education	14
<u>Methodological Approach</u>	21
Hypothesis	21
Surveys	25
Interviews	29
Focus Groups	30
<u>Empirical Findings</u>	33
Traditional Ideological Convictions Meet Modern Ideological Reform	36
<i>Traditional Understandings and Convictions</i>	36
<i>Modern Ideological Reform</i>	45
The Effect of Environmental Factors	52
<i>Health Factors</i>	53
<i>Financial Struggles</i>	56
Product of the Cultural Process	58
<i>Early Marriage</i>	58
<u>Conclusion</u>	64
Research vs. Literature Predictions	67
Limitations of Research	70
Further Research	73
Policy Recommendations	74
<u>Works Cited</u>	76
<u>Appendix A</u>	78
<u>Appendix B</u>	80

INTRODUCTION

The people of Kakamega, Kenya, live under conditions foreign to many of those not living in a low-income country¹ like Kenya. With a population of around 70,000, Kakamega is the provincial headquarters of the Western Province and is located near Lake Victoria on the border of Uganda. Kisumu is the largest city within relatively close proximity. The majority of economic activity consists of subsistence and cash crop farming as well as small trade. The service sector is the largest contributor to the GDP, followed by agriculture. Led by President Mwai Kibaki, Kenya is organized into eight provinces. Both Kiswahili and English are the official languages of Kenya.

Most people of Kakamega District belong to the Luhya tribe. With 14 percent of the population, the Luhya tribe is the second largest in the country behind only the Kikuyu, which comprises 22 percent of the population. Culture of the Luhya tribe centers on the importance of extended family and religion. Historically, polygamy and dowry were defining aspects of marriage arrangements and a man of many wives was synonymous with a man of power. Although not the traditional religion, Christianity is the predominant religion of the Luhya. This is representative of religious patterns throughout all tribes of Kenya. 45 percent of Kenyans identify as Protestant, 33 percent as Catholic, and 10 percent as Islamic. The significance of family to the Luhya contributes to a distinct gender hierarchy within the family structure. The eldest living man is traditionally the head of the household and the eldest son is the first to inherit the family's authority.

¹ A "low-income country" is a country that was formerly identified as "developing." "Low-income" is more correct in that it does not connote a linear path towards development and it does not imply that high-income (or "developed") countries have achieved complete development.

Kakamega is a site of rapid change. Although traditional gender roles are strongly present, the nature of these roles is evolving. After the ratification of the new Kenyan constitution in August 2010, women are allowed to inherit property. This legislative amendment is reflective of a woman's emergent role within the family and the community. Along with this change comes a transformation in perception of women's education in the greater society. As social norms transform and the cultural landscape evolves over time, how have perceptions of women's education adapted? In what ways has this evolution of the cultural composition affected attitudes towards women's education? Despite positive change, what barriers exist that oppose gender parity in education? This research project aims to identify the effects of several key societal factors on the societal understanding of women's education. These factors include (1) household dynamics, (2) cultural traditions, (3) environmental factors, and (4) health issues. What part of society's structure has the most significant influence on a parent's decision to send his or her daughter to school? The link between education (especially women's education) and economic development has been proven indisputable. It is logical that the poverty and disease of the country correlates to the low academic achievement of its women.²

Project Africa is a non-profit organization with its origin and primary headquarters in Sweden. As of 2010, the organization has a branch in Lunga Lungu, Mumias, and Kakamega, Kenya. Project Africa's mission is "to support social and economic empowerment for women and girls living in rural Africa through education and training,

² Grown, Gupta, Kes. "Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and empowering Women." Achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Project. London, UK. 2005.

healthcare, and provision of resources needed for enterprise development. We aim to achieve this through our model of learning by doing and earning.” By giving women the skills and resources they need to support themselves, Project Africa aims particularly at gender parity in education.

The current gender inequality in education at all levels is an issue of global magnitude. Although this study focuses on disparities within Kakamega, the gap in educational attainment persists throughout the world. Generally, lower income countries experience a wider gender gap in educational attainment. This is an issue of concern because of the associated consequences of low educational attainment of women and of lower economic development. Lower economic development corresponds to a greater prevalence of disease (especially HIV throughout Africa), a higher infant mortality rate, and a lower life expectancy (Grown, Gupta, Kes). Education is the opportunity to break this dangerous cycle. Identifying the causes of this educational inequality has implications far beyond a single community. The results of this study are applicable for comparisons of situations of other communities that seem to be in a similar cyclic poverty provoked by gender inequality in education.

Through a case study of the community of Kakamega, Kenya, this project aims to identify the aspects of society that most significantly affect the understanding of women’s education and the parental decision to send a daughter to school.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

“What factors influence the societal perception of women’s education in Kakamega, Kenya?”

“What societal influences have the greatest effect on a parent’s decision whether to send a daughter to school?”

LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive review of literature reveals a few key areas of interest. The areas and topics highlighted below provide the best background information necessary to understand the situation of Kakamega. This review of previous research and present literature places this research project in a national and global context. The review is structured into four basic components:

- (1) Trends in educational disparities
- (2) Specific case studies for comparison
- (3) The proven importance of educating women
- (4) Impediments to gender parity in education

The final section (impediments to gender parity in education) was initially structured to lay the foundation for which the methodology and empirical analysis of the research would be based. However, the empirical findings lent themselves to be better organized through a different model. Therefore, the following literature review does not

correspond structurally with the empirical analysis.

Trends in Global, Regional, and National Disparities in Education

The road to global gender parity in education has been a turbulent one. In the following literature review, gender parity is defined as 100 percent female enrolment to 100 percent male enrolment (or enrolment at a one-to-one ration). While communities throughout the world have made significant progress towards gender equality in different levels of education, sub-Saharan Africa's path towards improved equality has not been a linear one. These educational trends in Kakamega are best understood when placed in the global, the regional, and the national context of Kenya.

Global Trends

The Education for All goals set out in Dakar in 2000 shed insight on progress towards gender parity in education. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of girls out of school has declined from 58 to 54. On a global scale, the world has made notable progress towards gender parity in education since 1999. In 2005, there were 94 girls enrolled in secondary education for every 100 boys worldwide. This was an improvement since 1999, when the numbers were 91 girls to every 100 boys. In 2005, only four countries (Botswana, China, Mexico, and Peru) out of 144 achieved gender parity at the tertiary level. From 1985-1994, 63 percent of the world's illiterate adults were women, and from 1995-2004, women accounted for 64 percent of illiterate adults (UNESCO 2008). The numbers remain similar currently, as adult illiteracy affects 759 million people—two thirds being women. However, the number of literate female adults has increased at a faster pace than has the number of male adult literates. According to

UNESCO reports, 28 countries as of 2010 had still not reached gender parity in education as defined by the fact that there are nine or fewer girls for every ten boys in school.

Sub-Saharan African Trends

Sub-Saharan Africa is making strides towards higher educational achievement. According to the 2010 Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO, it has increased general enrollment rates by five times the rate in the 1990s. Despite these positive changes, in 2005 the region still accounted for 45 percent of the world's out-of-school children of primary school age with 54 percent of these children being girls.

Gender parity is more within reach at the primary school level, with larger gender gaps at higher levels of education (both globally and in sub-Saharan Africa). However, across the region, the number of girls entering school was less than 80% of that of boys in 2005.

At the secondary education level, sub-Saharan Africa experienced a shift away from gender parity 1999 to 2005 (UNESCO 2008). In 2005, UNESCO reports revealed that at the secondary education level sub-Saharan African girls enrolled at a rate of 83 to every 100 boys. According to UNESCO's "2010 Education for All Monitoring Report," as of 2010 almost 12 million girls are expected to never enroll in school.

Kenyan Trends³

³ The majority of information in this section is based on the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS). The abstract for these reports is as follows: "Final reports are produced for most DHS surveys. Comprehensive survey results are published in the DHS Final Reports approximately 8-12 months after the completion of fieldwork. Standard reports are approximately 200 pages in length and include, but are not limited to, topics such as: household and respondent characteristics, fertility and family planning, maternal and child health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS."

As of 2009, 19.3 percent of Kenyans females have no education at all, compared to 23 percent in 2003. However, 13.1 percent of males have no education at all, compared with 16 percent in 2003. In 2003 22 percent of males had attained some secondary education, while only 17 percent of females had attained any secondary education. However, in 2009, 8.7 percent of females had completed secondary school while 12.3 percent of males had completed secondary school. The number of schooling years completed is 6.0 for males and 5.2 for females. (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003 and 2008-2009).

From the 1998 to the 2008-2009 KDHS, the school attendance rates have slightly improved for both genders. Still, there are noticeable gender trends with serious implications. While attendance rates are at par around 89 percent for the age group 6-10 years, girls generally drop out of school at a younger age than boys do. After age 11-15, the gender disparity widens so much that by age 21-24, 11 percent of males are enrolled in school and only 4 percent of females are still enrolled (KDHS 2003). In 2008-2009, in the Western Province, the secondary school net enrollment ratio (percent of children in secondary school of secondary school age) was 14.0 for males and 6.2 for females—expressing a huge gender gap that was not at present at the primary school level (79.0 and 82.0) (KDHS 2008-2009). This demonstrates both the lower attendance rates at higher levels of education, as well as the higher gender disparity at higher levels of education.

Case Studies

Various case studies have been conducted in countries beyond Kenya that evaluate the progress towards gender parity in education. The following studies provide a

basis with which to compare the case of Kakamega. Their methods of evaluating gender parity and of measuring disparity are useful resources. Although the specifics of the situations are undoubtedly different, certain conclusions can be very instrumental in researching Kakamega. The factors that have proven through these studies to cause gender gaps in education can be tested in Kakamega.

Eritrea⁴ presents an exaggerated case in comparison to Kakamega, but there are lessons to be learned. In 2002, it is estimated that about 33 percent of the population in secondary schools were females while about 67 percent were males. The causes of this disparity are as follows. Marriage accounts for 38 percent of the girls who leave school. Ten percent of those who drop out do so to stay home and care for siblings or do housework. In Eritrea, these statistics stem from a cultural belief that a girl should marry young, stay home, and disregard education in favor of domestic work. Other evidence shows that school distance causes the gender gap in Eritrean education. Ravinder Rena also cites “a mix of traditional mores” that contribute to this gap including poverty, lack of parental interest, nomadic lifestyles, the practice of early marriage, lack of sanitary system and a lack of clean water in schools.

Results of another case study are applicable to this project. K. Harel conducted a study addressing the obstacles girls face in relation to education and gender in Kenya. The findings show that boys were observed bullying girls and sexually harassing them under the indifference of teachers. Teachers also described female students as “stupid and lazy.” Both male and female teachers preferred to teach boys to girls and assigned

⁴ Rena, Ravinder , Gender Disparity in Education - An Eritrean Perspective (January 25, 2005). The Global Child Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 43-49, 2005. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1288943>

“menial tasks” to girls. Essentially, this research found teachers to be highly prejudiced against girls (Harel, 1997).

Importance of Educating Women

Improving the education of women is a primarily undisputed concept throughout literature and past research studies. Many international organizations (such as UNESCO) consider education a basic human right. Beyond this, however, studies show that widespread basic education yields various other significant benefits. The effects of education benefit both the individual and his or her respective community. The International Federation of Social Workers defined equal access to education as a core value of social progression and an important issue of human rights. (Roby, Lambert, Lambert, 342). Le Vine, Le Vine, and Schnell confirm that formal education is a “major pathway for human improvement, and the schooling of women [is] the most potent ingredient in the pervasive influences of mass education” (2001, 2). Studies have proven that earning an education empowers women in a positive way that increases her income-earning potential, her decision-making autonomy, her control over fertility, and her participation in public life.

Additionally, there are many economic benefits to educating women. Higher investment in the education of a woman increases the gains from her labor force participation more so than investment in a man’s education and corresponding gains from his labor force participation. Lower fertility rates with corresponding decreased infant mortality rates are associated with an increased education for women. Women who are more educated are more in control of their own fertility and on average have fewer

children than less educated women. Each additional year of mother's education cuts the infant mortality rate by 5-15 percent. (Grown, Gupta, Kes).

Increased education is also correlated with a lower age of marriage for women. Women of lower education are likely to get married at a younger age than those who are more educated. The enrollment of girls in secondary education is inversely related to the percentage of girls married before 18 years of age (Grown, Gupta, Kes). Increased education also promotes a more positive self-image and is related to less violence against women. Education for women also brings benefits in combating HIV/AIDS. Increased knowledge about this disease leads to lower rates of infection.

Inhibitors to Gender Parity in Education

Household dynamics

Various aspects of the family and household dynamics affect educational attainment rates of women. A household characteristic of significance is parental education. Literature proves this is especially true for the education level of the mother. Deon Filmer's multivariate study of KDHS surveys concludes that, "in a subset of countries with a large female disadvantage in enrollment, the education of adult females has a larger impact on the enrollment of girls than that of boys" (Filmer 5). A mother with higher education is more likely to see the benefit in educating her daughter than a mother with lower education (King, Hill). Parental level of education also signifies the extent to which the parents are open to influences other than "tradition." More explicitly stated, educated parents are less likely to view education as a threat to a traditional way of life. Filmer establishes that "the education of adults in the household has a significant

relationship with the enrollment of children in practically all the countries studied, even after controlling for household wealth” (Filmer 5).

According to the KDHS in 2003, in the Western Province of Kenya, 62.2 percent of families are male-headed and 37.8 percent of families are female-headed (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 2003). In the 2008-09 KDHS survey, however, these numbers decreased as 66.1 percent of households were male headed and 33.9 percent were female headed.

Another household factor of consideration is a daughter’s domestic demands and obligations. Throughout low-income countries, girls are given the responsibility of household chores and maintenance while the boys are exempt from these responsibilities. These household demands may lead to higher dropout rates among girls than boys (King, Hill).

A family’s income is another component that factors into a parent’s decision whether to send a child (of either gender) to school. Financial issues arise in response to educational demands such as uniforms, books, supplies, and tuition. In the study by Roby et al. household income was “strongly related with children’s enrollment rates” and “children’s attendance rates also illustrate this [positive] relationship between income and school attendance.” Roby et al. as well as Deon Filmer ascertain that household poverty has a much more detrimental effect on the enrollment and attendance rate of a daughter than of a son. In “The Structure of Social Disparities in Education: Gender and Wealth.” Deon Filmer states that “some countries with a female disadvantage, household wealth interacts with gender to create an especially large disadvantage among the poor” (Filmer 1). Filmer’s work uses a multivariate analysis to assess the interaction between gender and wealth to create inequalities in educational enrollment and attainment. The research

concludes that “the interaction of gender and wealth result in large gaps in educational outcomes” (Filmer 1).

Another household factor of consideration is the number of children in the family (including the number of younger siblings). The average Kenyan family size is 4.4 (KDHS, 2003). Dropout rates are significantly lower for girls with younger siblings. Additionally, girls with younger siblings have lower educational attainment rates than boys with younger siblings. (Lloyd and Blanc, 2006),

Traditional Cultural Beliefs and Practices

Early marriage is a direct cause of lower educational attainment for women in Kenya as well as globally (Ikamari, 2005). It is widely expected throughout sub-Saharan Africa for girls to marry at some point in early womanhood. With marriage given such high priority, education for women is not (Kwesiga). In addition to being subject to the pressure of imminent marriage, girls throughout sub-Saharan Africa are traditionally expected to care for the family and the home. This role of a homemaker is even stronger for married women. Traditional culture dictates that a woman’s job is in the home while the man is to provide financially. There is a proven unequal gender division of labor in Kenya where more traditional beliefs are held and the burden of housework poses a challenge to girls’ educational attainment (Aikman, Unterhalter, 2005).

Early marriage (before the age of 18) is a serious concern in Kenya. As of 2003, 51 percent of women were married by their twentieth birthday. From the 1998 KDHS survey to the 2003 KDHS survey, the median age of first marriage⁵ increased from 19.2 years to 19.8 years. In 2009, this number was 20 for women in Kenya and 25.1 for men.

⁵ The age at first marriage is calculated as the age when the participant (in KDHS) began living with his or her first spouse.

Women from the North Eastern, Nyanza, Western, Coast and Rift Valley provinces generally marry at a younger age than women in Central, Eastern, and Nairobi provinces. The median age at first marriage for women with no education was 17.5 and 22.4 for women with at least secondary education.

Another offshoot of early marriage is high fertility rate. Data shows that women who marry early regularly give birth to more children (KDHS 2003). “Marriage is generally associated with fertility because it is correlated with exposure to risk of conception. The duration of exposure to the risk of pregnancy depends primarily on the age at which women first marry. Women who marry earlier, on average, have their first child earlier and give birth to more children, contributing to higher fertility rates” (2008-09 KDHS).

The fertility rate of a woman is negatively associated with her educational attainment level (KDHS 2008-09). The total fertility rate of women decreased from 6.7 percent for women with no education to 3.1 for women with at least some secondary education. This data illuminates the association between higher education and lower fertility rates. Fertility rates in Kenya have been steadily decreasing since 1975. In the 1975-78 KDHS, the average fertility rate was 8.1. The 2006-08 KDHS shows that the rate for that time period was 4.6 percent.

Past studies attribute early marriage to a variety of cultural factors. Bledsoe and Cohen cite polygyny, “bridewealth” (dowry), and kinship as key influences. “Given the political potentials of marriage, family elders are anxious to control when youth marry and whom they marry” (Bledsoe, Cohen, 40).

Polygamy is legal and prevalent in many families throughout Kenya. The practice of polygyny (a marriage among one man and multiple women) is commonly accepted throughout Africa. It is “common in Africa and has implications for frequency of sexual activity and fertility” (2008-09 KDHS, 80). In 2003, 16 percent of married women in Kenya lived in polygynous unions (unions with two or more wives). As of 2008-09, this number decreased to 13 percent. In the Western Province specifically, 23 percent of women reported having a husband with at least one other wife. Education and polygyny are connected in that “women with no or low education and those who are poorest are most likely to live in polygynous marriages” (2008-09 KDHS, 80). 8.5 percent of women with no education had at least two other co-wives, while only 1.0 percent of women with secondary education had at least two other co-wives.⁶

Polygyny ensures the survival of familial lineage and reflects a patriarchal nature of the community. However, in the process, it leads to higher fertility rates, as each wife has multiple children (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 2001). While polygamy is associated with higher fertility, it also has links to a lower status of women. Makinwa-Adebusoye, in his study of sociocultural factors that affect fertility in sub-Saharan Africa, notes that “the patriarchal, hierarchical and polygynous organisation of many households tends to perpetuate the low status of women in African societies” (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 12-6).

Another issue affecting education is a lack of positive female role models in communities throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In societies where successful female role

⁶ Both of these percentages are lower than they were in the 2003 KDHS survey. In 2003, 11.6 percent of women with no education had at least two other wives and 1.6 percent of women with secondary education had at least two other wives.

models are not present, young girls fall victim to the cycle of financial dependence on men.

Environmental Factors

Studies have proven the connection between a few key environmental factors and the level of girls' educational attainment. The distance of a child's home to school is a notable consideration when assessing drop out rates and level of educational attainment. Studies show that a student studying at a school a farther distance away from home will spend less time working. With a larger home-to-school distance comes the increased risk of danger (i.e. sexual harassment for girls) (Roby et al.).

The quality of education at the regional schools is a large determinant of whether parents send their children to school and subsequently whether they keep them in school. Courses offered and messages about sex roles conveyed by educational materials affect female enrollment (King, Hill). Poor conditions of school facilities correspond with higher repetition rates (Kwesiga).

Another factor of considerable importance is the economic condition of the home and the country. The 2008-09 KDHS characterizes the "household environment" by drinking water, household sanitation facilities, and housing characteristics. As of 2008-2009, 63 percent of households had access to improved sources of drinking water and 22.6 percent had "improved" sanitation facilities. Additionally, the percentage of homes with electricity has risen from 16 percent in 2003 to 23 percent. However, there is a large imbalance between homes in urban and rural settings: 66 percent to 8 percent, respectively. The World Bank Report of 2008 notes that the GNI per capita of Kenya is \$770. The educational gap between girls and boys is the largest for countries the poorest

countries and disappears in the wealthiest countries (Kwesiga). This is largely because poor economic conditions restrict access to education.

Health Issues

Another outstanding barrier to women's education is the prevalence of diseases. In particular, HIV/AIDS has wreaked havoc on the lives and educational prospects of the girls in Kakamega. In 2003 HIV affected 6.7 percent of Kenyan adults, while in 2008 the rate dropped to 6.3 percent (according to the Kenya Demographic and Health Surveys from the respective years). In the Western Province alone (where Kakamega is located), the rate is slightly higher than the national average with a total of 6.6 percent.

There is also gender inequality evident in the prevalence of HIV in Kenya. According to the 2008-2009 KDHS, 8 percent of women aged 15-49 are infected with HIV while only 4.3 percent of men of the same age group are infected. In the Western Province, the HIV rate for women of this age group jumps to 9.2 percent for women and drops to 3.4 percent for men. Women between age 20 and age 30 are particularly vulnerable (KDHS 2003). UNICEF provides evidence that girls in Africa ages 15-19 are about eight times more likely to be HIV-positive than are boys their age (Evans). The prevalence of HIV is aggravated by the prominence of polygamous unions in Kenya. "Men and women in polygynous unions are more likely to be HIV-infected than those in monogamous unions (11.6 percent, compared with 6.9 percent)" (2003 KDHS, 17).

Another health risk concerns the prevalence of malaria. Malaria presents a serious health threat to the Kenyan population; however, the situation is improving as the country takes action. The 2008-09 KDHS shows a reduction in the percent of households with insecticide treated nets to 56 percent, compared to 48 percent in 2003.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH⁷

The methodology of this research utilizes a mixed methods approach. First, I will determine from the literature what factors should affect societal views of women's education. Then, I will examine in what ways these predetermined factors influence a parent's decision to send a daughter to school through primary research in Kakamega, Kenya. The research takes the form of an in-depth case study that relies on four methods of data collection: review of published data, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. All primary research will be conducted on site in Kakamega, Kenya. I will be living in Kakamega from June 30 to August 23, 2010 around Kakamega Town in the home of a host family. I will be collaborating with and using the assistance of Project Africa while in the community as a full-time intern. Over the course of this 8-week period, I will rely on Project Africa's expertise of the Kakamega area and its population as well as in the field of women's issues and empowerment.

Hypothesis

Based on the evidentiary findings of the literature, I predict to find certain factors should impact community perceptions of women's education more strongly than others. Taking into consideration the four predetermined areas of significance (household dynamics, traditional cultural practices, environmental factors, and health issues), I predict that traditional cultural practices will have the greatest impact on collective understandings of educating women. These cultural practices include early marriage, dowry, polygamy, and a lack of positive female role models (i.e. professional women) in society.

⁷ All research procedures were pre-approved by the Institutional Review Board.

The factor with the least predicted significance is health. The pervasiveness of HIV/AIDS and malaria should not affect societal understandings of women's education and gender parity. While these factors may contribute to low retention rates, they should not affect as appreciably the societal perceptions of women's education.

In-Depth Case Study

Past studies prove educating a woman decreases both fertility and infant mortality rates, increases both a woman's self-worth and the national human capital, and reduces the effects of prevalent diseases⁸. This case study will provide a supplementary example of the literature already present about women's education in low-income countries. By focusing on a single community, I will be able to most precisely identify all of the factors that influence a girl's access to education in my given length of stay in Kakamega. I have chosen to focus on Kakamega because of the dramatic and perceptible changes the community is undergoing. Kakamega is still an economically underdeveloped town with a unique mixture of urban and rural landscape. While the majority of Kakamega is rural, the landscape of Kakamega Town⁹ is visibly urbanizing. Kakamega is representative of many similar regions in Kenya and throughout Africa with regard to the cultural importance of traditional values. Religion (particularly Christianity) is at the crux of culture and many customs of society. Polygamy is also common, as it is among many communities of sub-Saharan Africa (see above review of literature).

⁸ See above section "Importance of Educating Women" and studies by "Le Vine, Le Vine, and Schnell," "Roby, Lambert, and Lambert," and "Gupta, Gupta, Kes."

⁹ Kakamega Town is the center of Kakamega and the area where the most of the local markets are located. It is the site of most of Kakamega's urbanization from what I could tell during my tenure.

As the aesthetics of the landscape are quickly changing with a growing number of construction projects and urbanization, so are the minds and the culture of the town's citizens. While many community members still hold tightly to traditional gender roles with male-dominating features, the youth and women's empowerment groups are bringing about a shift in thinking. After recent events, women now have the legal right to inherit property in Kenya¹⁰. Although this may be a small step towards gender parity, it is a reflection of the dynamic nature of both the country and the town. In this small town of Kakamega alone, there are multiple women's empowerment and women's rights groups, including Project Africa, WEAP (Western Education Advocacy and Empowerment Program), and ACCES (African Canadian Continuing Education Society)¹¹. Through my research, I can isolate confounding factors and best understand the working of the society as an individual unit. Then, after drawing conclusions about the case study, I will be able to compare the findings with previous studies and expand the information to the greater global society. This research will illuminate how the society is progressing towards universal access to education and what final blockages to this goal remain.

Although both qualitative and quantitative information are a part of this study, the results will rely more heavily on qualitative information to draw a conclusion about the communal attitudes towards women's education. Quantitative information will provide data about the specifics of the situation. Data of this sort will be in the form of statistics about family size and other household characteristics. This information will help build the profile of the community and characterize Kakamega, by providing a deeper analysis

¹⁰ A new constitution was voted on and ratified in August 2010. This constitution allows for women to inherit property, a practice that was before illegal.

¹¹ The Foundation of Sustainable Development engages in partnerships with all of these organizations.

of the families in the study. The results will be used as summary statistics and will not be used to generate statistical modeling or regression analysis.

Qualitative information (obtained primarily through focus groups) will explain the “whys” of the statistics regarding environmental factors, household factors, and health factors the girls face. Through focus groups with predetermined individuals, this research will be able to grasp as thoroughly as possible, an understanding of why these attitudes are present and what affects these attitudes. While both sorts of information are different in their purpose and method of acquisition, both are necessary to describe and analyze the situation.

Support by Published Data and Secondary Sources

While the primary research that will be collected on-site will provide indicators and information specific to Kakamega, the information from secondary sources provides the context in which to place the primary research. Data collected from literary research will serve as the foundation for my research methods as well as case studies by which to compare my findings in both a national and an international setting.

I have included this step because I want to reference trends I find in Kakamega with trends in the world and in Kenya. This secondary research will provide information about the political, cultural, and economic context. What have been the economic trends over the past years in Kenya and abroad? How has family structure evolved and impacted the status of women’s education? How has the status of HIV/AIDS and other diseases affected educational attainment? What are the trends in educational achievement for both genders in the country? How has gender parity improved in Kenya (if it has even improved at all)?

Most of this information will be acquired through similar in-depth case studies as well as various research studies. Most of the quantitative data that I have previously presented is from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey. In addition, organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF provide extensive research information collected from previous studies. National information and data about Kenya will be synthesized to understand the trends of the region. Additionally, case studies on similar topics will provide useful information. These case studies will provide a broader picture in which to place Kakamega.

Surveys

Data from formal surveys will account for a large part of the results. I will survey four different groups of individuals: female students in secondary school, male students in secondary school, parents of surveyed students, and teachers of surveyed students. I have chosen to focus on children in secondary school for a few important reasons. First, gender disparities in education are generally larger in higher levels of education. Dropout rates are higher for girls in secondary school than they are at the primary school level¹². I also considered the level of maturity of the children. Assuming that an older cohort of children would be more mature than a younger group, I chose this level as opposed to primary education in the hopes of attaining more honest and mature responses. Children at this level of education and age are able to think more critically than younger children and can provide more insightful information.

The purpose of the surveys is to provide data on the characteristics of these children and their families. The consent forms approved by the Institutional Review

¹² Please see the section, “Trends in Global, Regional, and National Disparities in Education.”

Board accompany every survey. Before completing a survey, each participant will read and sign the consent form. If the child is under 18 (the age of a legal adult in Kenya), his or her parent must also sign a consent form confirming participation in my study. If the participant is a minor, they must sign a form of assent as well as the signed consent form from his or her parents. No individual will be specifically linked to his or her answers in the completed work of my research. In the event that a subject is illiterate, I will orally present the material to them and transcribe their answers, with their permission. If they cannot understand the questions because they are illiterate in English, I will employ a translator.

In designing the survey questions, I will minimize differences between the selected sample and the entire population of Kakamega. To do this I must consider the issue of how closely the selected sample mirrors the population and how well the answers measure the characteristic to be described (Survey Research Methods, Fowler). I will choose participants in ways that do not exclude any particular part of the population based on a certain characteristic to avoid biased results. For example, I will choose schools that are non-denominational. I will also survey at least one boarding school and one non-boarding school. I will also include at least one coeducational school and one school that is exclusively male or exclusively female.

Survey 1: Female Students

For formal surveys with female students, I will need assent forms from the individuals as well as consent forms from their parents. Once I have consent, I will distribute the surveys. Because almost all classes are taught in English, most students understand and speak English well. The selection of girl participants is crucial in

providing comprehensive and unbiased results. I will work with Project Africa to ensure that I have the most representative group of girls. My goal will be to survey at least 25 girls in secondary school. I will survey girls from Matende Secondary School (an all-girls school), Shieywe Secondary School (a co-educational school), as well as Kakamega Township (a co-educational school). This sample population will provide adequate breadth and comprehensiveness—capturing the attitudes of girls in high-performing schools and girls in low performing schools. More importantly, the surveys will capture the attitudes of girls in co-educational schools as well as all-girls schools.

(Survey in Appendix A)

Survey 2: Male Students

Male students in Kakamega will provide a different perspective on educating women than their female counterparts. Without understanding these perspectives towards educating women, the research would not be a complete and comprehensive representation of Kakamega. The procedure for male students is similar to that of female students. I will gain the consent of each individual's parent and then the assent of the student. For the case of Kakamega High School, however, the procedure will be a bit different because of the nature of boarding schools. Parental consent forms are not logically feasible, therefore, I will gain consent of the closest guardian of the students—the principal of Kakamega High School¹³. I will survey boys in secondary school from Kakamega High School (an all-boys school), Kakamega Township (a co-educational school), and Shieywe Secondary School (a co-educational school). The population sample size is approximately 25-30 students.

¹³ This was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

(Survey in Appendix A)

Survey 3: Parents

Children are products of their parents and of their home environments. Often parental attitudes affect the opinions of their children. To accurately assess the impact of the home environment on children, I must first describe the homes from which these children come. I will do this through surveying the parents of the student participants. I will send home surveys along with consent forms (of their own participation and of their child's) to all parents, excluding parents of children in Kakamega High School. The surveys of the families will provide background information on the context in which these children are growing up. It is essential to know the characteristics of the households, such as median income, family structure, education of the mother etc. as well as the family attitudes towards educated women.

The surveys for parents will include both quantitative and qualitative questions. The quantitative questions (e.g. "What is your median income? How many children live in this household?") will provide background information on what sort of home environment girls of Kakamega are raised in. More qualitative questions (e.g. "If you send your daughter to school, why do you do so?" "If you had a daughter would you send her to school? Why or why not?") will shed insight into the attitudes towards women's education. These questions will provide the "why" behind the attitudes of the people of Kakamega.

(Survey in Appendix A)

Survey 4: Teachers

I will distribute surveys to teachers in various institutions throughout Kakamega to assess their views of educating women. Opinions of teachers often highly affect the performance of their students, as they are a key source of role models. I am interested in researching the different expectations teachers have for the achievement of girls versus that of boys. The survey questions are aimed at discovering the attitudes of teachers across the community to further assess opinions on educating women. I will survey teachers from all of the schools that I visit, including Kakamega Township, Matende Secondary School, Shieywe Secondary School, and Kakamega High School. The sample size is 15-20 teachers.

(Survey in Appendix A)

Interviews

While in Kakamega, I will conduct a series of interviews. These interviews will provide deeper and more specific insight into societal attitudes. I will conduct interviews after having been in Kakamega for a few weeks and acquiring a better understanding of the culture, the population, and the customs of society. Project Africa will have the expertise to guide me in the best direction of whom to contact.

Local Education Officials

After having worked with Project Africa, I identified three individuals for interviews. I will refer to these individuals as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and Interviewee 3. All of these individuals work in a department of either the district or the provincial headquarters of education. The interviews contain questions about trends and attitudes the individuals observe in the community as well as personal opinions and

attitudes towards women's education. All interviews were based off of a template of interview questions. I also conducted an informal interview in the regional population office to gather information about Kakamega.

(See Appendix B)

“Young Mothers” Subset

The second set of interviews involves the women from the “Young Mothers” group. I chose this group of women because I want to get the perspective of women who have dropped out of school. All of the “Young Mothers” I will interview will have left school before completing secondary school. Because it is difficult to survey school dropouts for logistical reasons of literacy, parental consent, etc. this is the best way to get the opinion of those who have left school. I will interview seven “Young Mothers.” Despite the title of the group, most of these women do not have children. All who are interviewed are in their teens or early twenties, while one is in her forties. All women have varying levels of education but none have completed secondary school.

(See Appendix B)

Focus Groups

Why focus groups?

Through focus groups I can collect data that explains more in-depth the “why” behind the quantitative data. Discussion with particular groups in the community will illuminate key trends and characteristics of certain attitudes. Focus groups will allow me to see first-hand characteristics of different groups and acquire a certain understanding unattainable through written surveys. The views people express in these groups will add a different dimension to the attitudes described through the data from surveys. I have

strategically created the two focus groups to concentrate on factors specific to each group. Certain questions apply to one group more than another. One group may illuminate one perspective more than the other would. By crafting each group to be nearly homogeneous, I can explain how each group perceives the importance of educating girls through the predetermined factors.

Group 1: “Young Mothers” Focus Group

The first focus group to be conducted will be the “Young Mothers” discussion group. This group usually meets every Wednesday at the Project Africa Mission House from 11AM – 1PM. Topics of discussion generally include women’s empowerment and challenges the women face. Previous discussion sessions I attended focused on violence against women and positive relationships. Volunteers at Project Africa lead the discussions; therefore I can easily take charge of one discussion session. Approximately 20 women will attend this focus group, as that is the usual attendance. The women of this group come from both Project Africa’s sewing class (about 15 women) and their computer class (about 10 women). Women pay a small fee of to be a member of the “Young Mothers” group where they learn these technical skills in a friendly and social environment. These women are perfect subjects for this particular research because they represent both uneducated and educated women who are facing serious issues of gender inequality in Kakamega. Although this is called the “Young Mothers” group, not all women have children, although some do. Because their marital and family situations are different, they will provide for a diverse and representative population. Their ages range from late teenage years to early forties. Education levels also differ from college degrees to primary school education.

The topic of this focus group will be centered on gender inequality in education and the participants' perceptions of women's education. Similar to the survey questions, this focus group will center on the issues of this research. I will broach topics of religion, gender relations, marriage customs, early marriage, and culture. I will conduct the two-hour session to follow the plan I have laid out. I will quote the women to maintain accuracy of their responses; however, I will not directly link their names with their quotes. Before using any of their responses or information, however, I will gain their consent. I will provide no incentives for the women to participate, and they will be free to leave at any point if they do not wish to continue in the study.

Group 2: Shieywe Secondary School

The second focus group involves a group of approximately 20 female students at Shieywe Secondary School. I chose to work with these students because Shieywe is a co-educational school and I believe their views of gender relations and inequalities are more helpful than students from an all-girls school. I had attended a few discussion groups with these girls before selecting them to participate in the study. I found their opinions unique and very different from the opinions of the "Young Mothers." I want to capture a breadth of views, thus I chose this group in addition to the "Young Mothers."

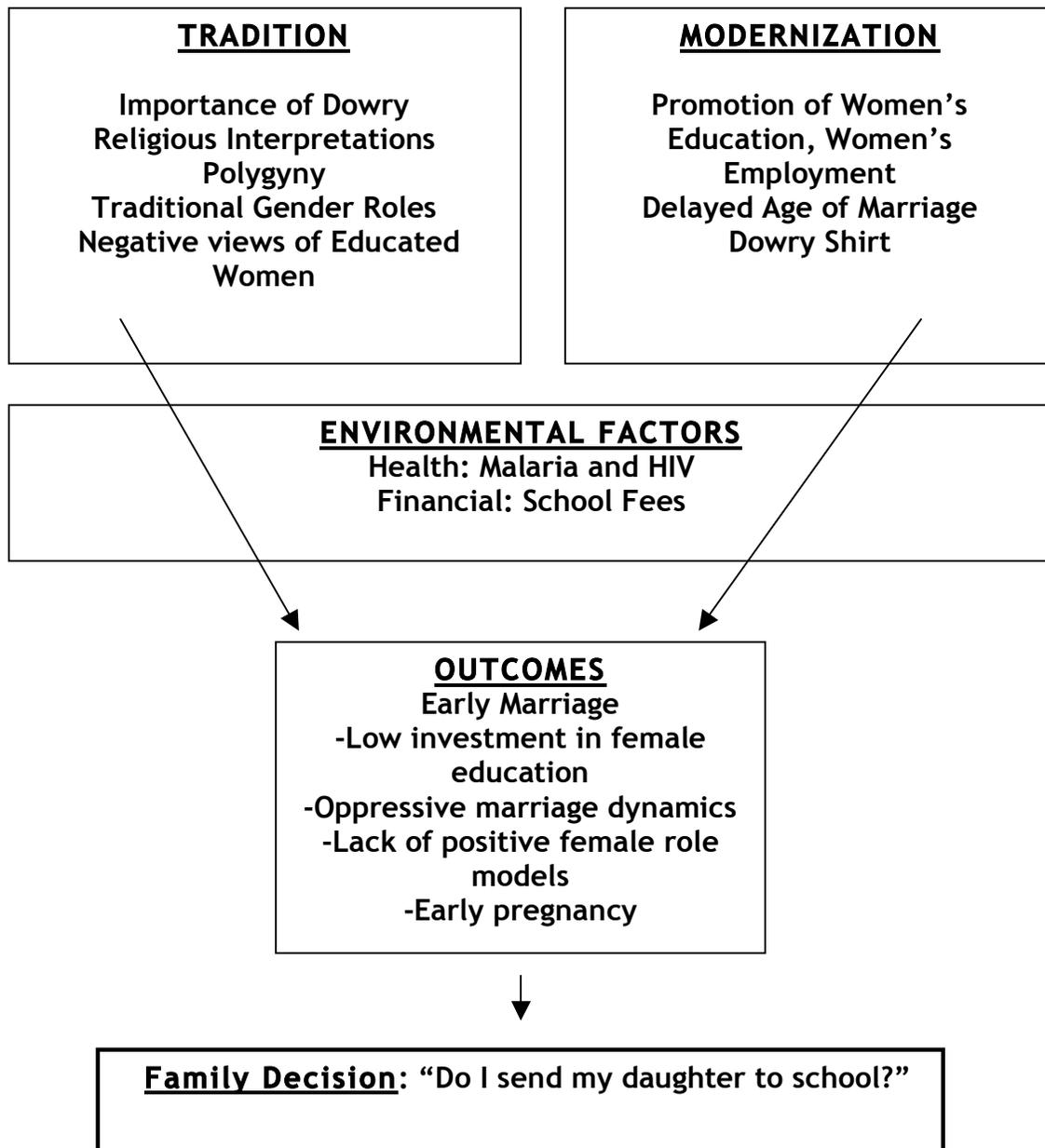
I will focus this discussion around the students' understanding of an educated woman. The aim is to shed light on various beliefs of the role of educated women, as well as the girls' individual goals and academic plans for the future. This discussion will highlight both objective and subjective topics. In addition to education inequalities, I will lead discussion towards other topics and gain their perspectives on education in relation to these topics. For example, I will ask about health and the prevalence of AIDS and

malaria in their homes, community, and school. I will also ask about their family structures and how their families affect their educational prospects. Another factor to consider is socioeconomic status. I will ask about their financial situation and how this has affected their educational attainment.

On a most subjective and personal level, I will ask about the importance of education to them. I will ask them about their responsibilities to their families and their communities and how education plays into this. I will ask them where they envision themselves years from now and who their main role models are. I will also ask them what they believe to be the differences between a man and a woman's role in society.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Throughout Kakamega, Kenya, there are two ideological forces at work. The product of these opposing forces is the societal attitude towards women's education. An individual parent's decision to send a daughter to school is the further result of community forces and community attitudes. The difficult economic condition and poor health conditions of the area further affect the ultimate decision of sending a daughter to school. This section will first elucidate the data on these two ideological forces in affecting the community attitude towards women's education. Next, this section will place these societal attitudes in the environmental context of Kakamega, Kenya. Finally, this section will illuminate the outcome of the interaction of these factors and a family's ultimate decision to send a daughter to school.



Examination of Proposed Hypothesis

The hypothesis set out to analyze the data through the four structural categories identified by the literature. The empirical evidence proves that the condition of Kakamega cannot be understood through analysis of these four static categories. Critical analysis of the proposed list of hypotheses demonstrates that the greater approach to the

hypothesis was incorrect. None of the four proposed factors has the single greatest measurable influence on understandings of women's education. This is because no one factor can be singled out of the complex equation that creates the societal condition. Each factor plays a role in the larger cycle of gender disparities in education; however, every role is substantially intertwined with each other. The hypothesis was also incorrect in attributing early marriage to a cultural practice. While it has been traditionally promoted by cultural convictions, early marriage is as much a byproduct of the process as a contributing factor. There is such a great degree of inter-relatedness among the four factors, that this study's results reveal a process as a social product, rather than the dominance of one factor. The unique influence of each factor in this process is explained in the following section.

Organizational Note:

I had initially intended to organize the empirical results in accordance with the structure of the literature review (i.e. the data would have been analyzed and presented through the four categories—household dynamics, traditional cultural beliefs and practices, environmental factors, and health issues). However, after collecting the data and examining the social patterns and cycles, I decided to restructure the material. I found a cyclic nature to the results that echoed a process and was unable to be reflected through the four static categories of the literature review. The following organization reveals the dynamic nature of the forces in Kenya that affect understandings of women's education. The first two sections explain the natures of the ideologies in their pure, static sense. The next section explains the environmental context as a separate entity. Finally, the last section (outcomes) explains the culmination of the first sections and their dynamic cyclic

nature. This section also attempts to analytically describe the realities of the current condition of Kakamega.

I. Traditional Ideological Convictions Meet Modern Ideological Reform

1. Traditional Understandings and Convictions

The attitudes that characterize Kakamega have developed largely from a set of long-standing cultural beliefs. Many of these beliefs and cultural norms are typical of societies throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The most relevant features of this traditional belief system for this research are the practice of dowry, the interpretation and application of religion, the practice of polygyny, the accepted gender roles of a family, and the negative view of educated women.

a. The Importance of Dowry

Dowry, or “bride price¹⁴,” is a commonly accepted practice in Kakamega. For many families who adhere to traditional practices, dowry is a crucial part of any marriage between a man and a woman. The future husband pays the mother of the bride a certain amount, usually in valued farm animals in addition to Kenyan shillings (KSH). Information from the “Young Mothers” focus groups indicates that dowry can range from 500,000 to 2 million KSH or 300 cows. The women noted that in the past, a husband “could give just one cow” to the father of the bride, but presently, men can give up to “300 cows and that is just appreciation.” This practice is found throughout Africa, and Kakamega is representative of many societies on the continent. Dowry is so crucial to a marriage arrangement that if a man does not pay dowry, society views that man as having

¹⁴ This is how various literary works refer to dowry and how it is commonly referred to in Kakamega.

stolen the daughter¹⁵. Dowry is seen as a sign of appreciation for the daughter and for the years the mother has invested in the daughter.

Dowry reinforces the identity of the daughter as property of the husband and his family. The husband must pay his mother-in-law for the resources she has invested in her daughter (data from the “Young Mothers” focus group highlights breast-feeding and education as these resources). The dowry is typically higher if the daughter has achieved a higher level of education. The belief a husband has stolen a daughter if he failed to pay dowry reveals an inequality in the roles of marriage. This inequality in marriage reflects the greater gender inequality that is also seen in the educational realm.

Furthermore, the existence of dowry creates an incentive for mothers to “marry off” their daughters. It is for this reason that dowry perpetuates the existence of early marriage. A subject in the Shieywe focus group expressed that “some parents say ‘I want to get your dowry before you die.’” This quote indicates the pressure young girls feel to get married and to earn a dowry for their parents. The statement reflects girls’ views that their parents find them useful only for their dowry. It implies that all the mother wants out of a daughter before she dies is her dowry. While this is obviously not the case for all parent-child relationships, it is glaringly present and an undeniable characteristic of some. The participants of this focus group cited dowry as a catalyst of early marriage.

b. Religious Interpretations and Applications

Religion is one of the most influential factors in the daily lives of the members of the Kakamega community. Strict religious adherence is widespread in the community, and religion forms the basis for nearly every daily decision. A teacher from Matende

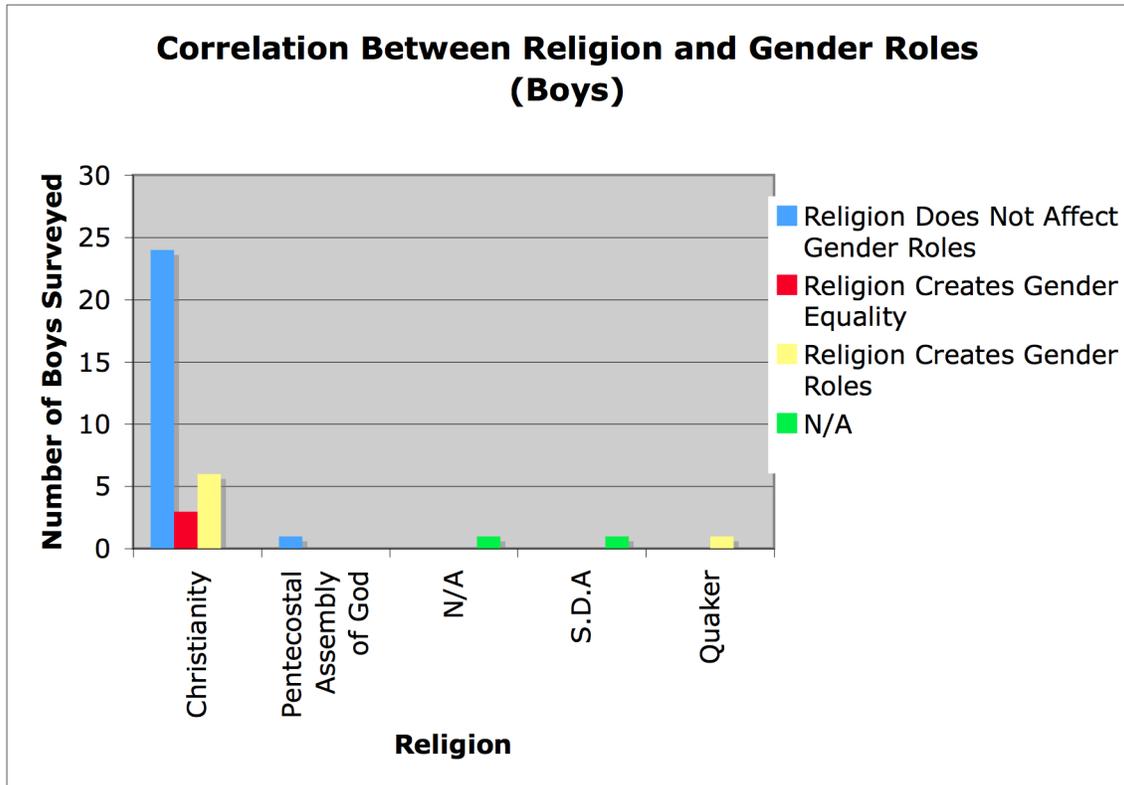
¹⁵ This view was supported in the Shieywe focus group.

noted that “the religion [Christianity] governs my daily life and beliefs.” One girl indicated in her survey that her religion is, “very important and it’s my way of life.” One 15 year-old boy indicated in his survey that his religion (Christianity) “helps me in the way I carry out myself with my character, thoughts, and how I approach certain situations.”

Christianity is the most prevalent religion in the community; however, there is a notable Muslim population. Other reported religions included The Society of Friends (Quakers), Pentecostal Assembly of God (PAG), Jehovah’s Witness, and Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A.). Out of 104 people surveyed about religion, 87 people identified as some denomination of Christianity, 5 people identified as Muslim, 8 people noted other religions and 4 had no response.

The data reveals that religion is an important determinant of societal attitudes and that Christianity is the most commonly followed practice. As a result of its cultural significance, religion is also an important factor in determining one’s view of gender roles. These are gender roles within a marriage and also that extend beyond the structure of marriage. One boy noted in his survey, “As we all know at the beginning God gave every person his/her roles. For example, a father is the head of the family and has to provide for the family. Women are supposed to built [sic] their houses a better place for living.” Although some survey responses reflected this view, the majority of respondents claimed that religion does not affect their view of gender roles.¹⁶ However, the focus groups revealed different data.

¹⁶ I attribute this difference to an inability to attribute understandings of gender roles directly to religion. Religion has been so ingrained in the minds of the children that they



The focus groups provided the most detailed information on societal attitudes towards religion. In these sessions, the women spoke openly on what they believe the Bible dictates about gender relations. For the women in the study, the construction of a marriage has its roots and foundations in the Bible. Marriage is understood Biblically. Both groups expressed that the man is traditionally the head of the household because that is what the Bible dictates. Additionally, both groups noted that “a woman was created from the ribs of a man” to be a companion in the house. One participant from the Shieywe group expressed that “the man leads the house because it says so in the Bible.”

may not be able to separate out religion as a contributor to their cultural understandings of educated women.

In addition to the religiously founded concept that men should be the head of the household, the data revealed the societal view that women should submit to men. Women in the “Young Mothers” focus group cited the Bible as commanding that wives should submit to their husbands. The women were in general agreement over this issue. One woman stated, “It is Biblical... Wives submit to your husbands and husbands love your wives.” Another woman in the group stated, “In the Bible we are told that the woman is supposed to submit to the husband.” These views express the larger communal attitudes that reference religion as the basis for women’s submission and clear gender roles.

c. The Practice of Polygyny

Although polygyny is practiced among modern families as well as the more traditional, the practice is rooted in traditional culture. Perceptions of polygyny were not the main focus of this study and data collected on this subject are primarily observational. In conversation, women in the “Young Mothers” group expressed an acceptance of polygyny. It is common for a man to take multiple wives. Traditionally, the husband may take a new wife at any point and the previous wife must accept the new woman completely.

Polygyny is accepted as more practical than monogamy. The man can have more children and more wives to take care of the children. Having more children was traditionally advantageous because that meant more people to help with household responsibilities and more people to generate income. Having more children also means more people to support the parents once they age and more chances to carry on the family name. From this stance, polygyny is practical and efficient at producing more family heirs.

The significance of polygyny in the traditionalist view is how it enforces gender roles. The man is the dominant party in the relationship and maintains the power and control over his wife (or wives). Women of the “Young Mothers” focus group expressed that it would be humorous for a woman to question her husband’s decision to take another wife. These gender roles place women below men on the totem pole of power.

An acceptance of polygyny is more prominent among the older generations. Discussions with the girls from Shieywe revealed that many younger girls are opposed to being involved in polygamous marriages. While the “Young Mothers” expressed acceptance of this practice as a social norm, most of the younger girls adamantly expressed resistance. Many girls stated they would never allow a future husband to marry another woman. These girls also claimed they would leave a husband if he took another wife.

d. Tradition Dictates Gender Roles

Traditional societal norms in Kakamega dictate gender-specific roles for members of the community. These gender roles exist primarily in the traditional ideological framework and, again, are representative of gender roles generalizable to communities throughout Africa. Data from all primary sources (surveys, focus groups, and interviews) indicate the presence of these gender roles. The man is the head of the household and the “breadwinner” while the woman is to care for the children and the house. Women maintain domestic responsibilities, while men bear the financial responsibility. Men should be educated and working in business, while women do farm work and bear children. These gender roles have arisen out of the belief that men should do manual

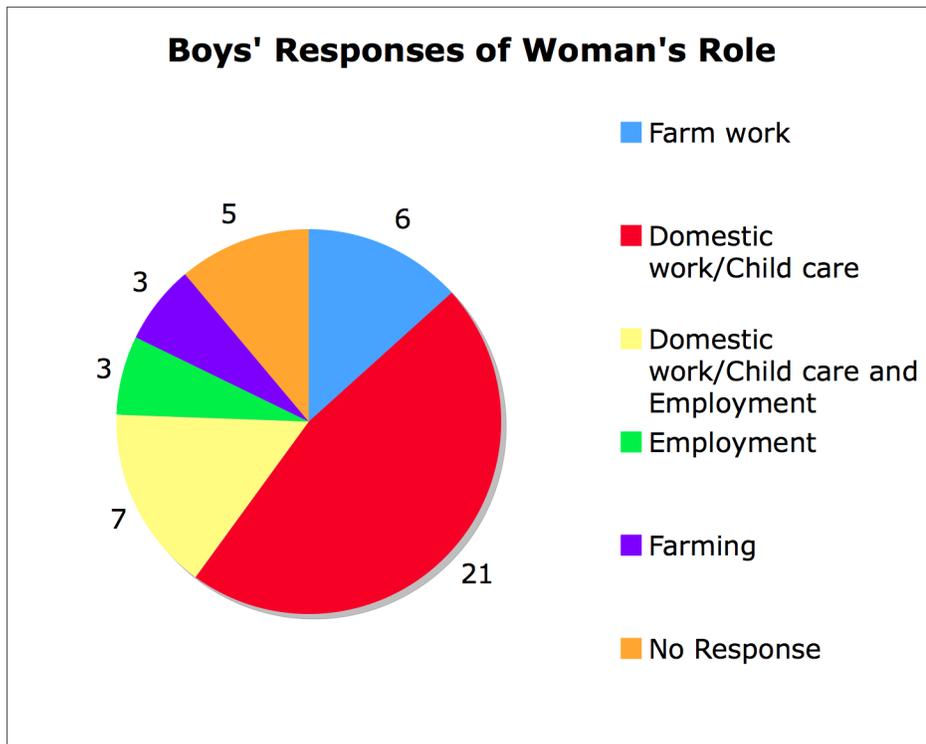
labor and physical work that women are not suited for because they are the supposed weaker sex.

Personal interviews revealed similar conclusions. Interviewee 1 attributed the creation of these gender roles to the supposition that “the men were more outgoing—this translated into modernity that men must go to school and get employed to pay for the family.” He also described the inferior status of women in traditional society. He stated, “African tradition perceives the woman as a weaker person in society. She is to remain back home and make men comfortable.” In regard to the societal view of a man’s position, he noted, “Men are the stronger sex and should have higher pay and should control the power to lead.” Interviewee 2 noted that “those really traditional societies hold onto those beliefs that a woman’s place is in the kitchen and then mans place is to fend for the family.”

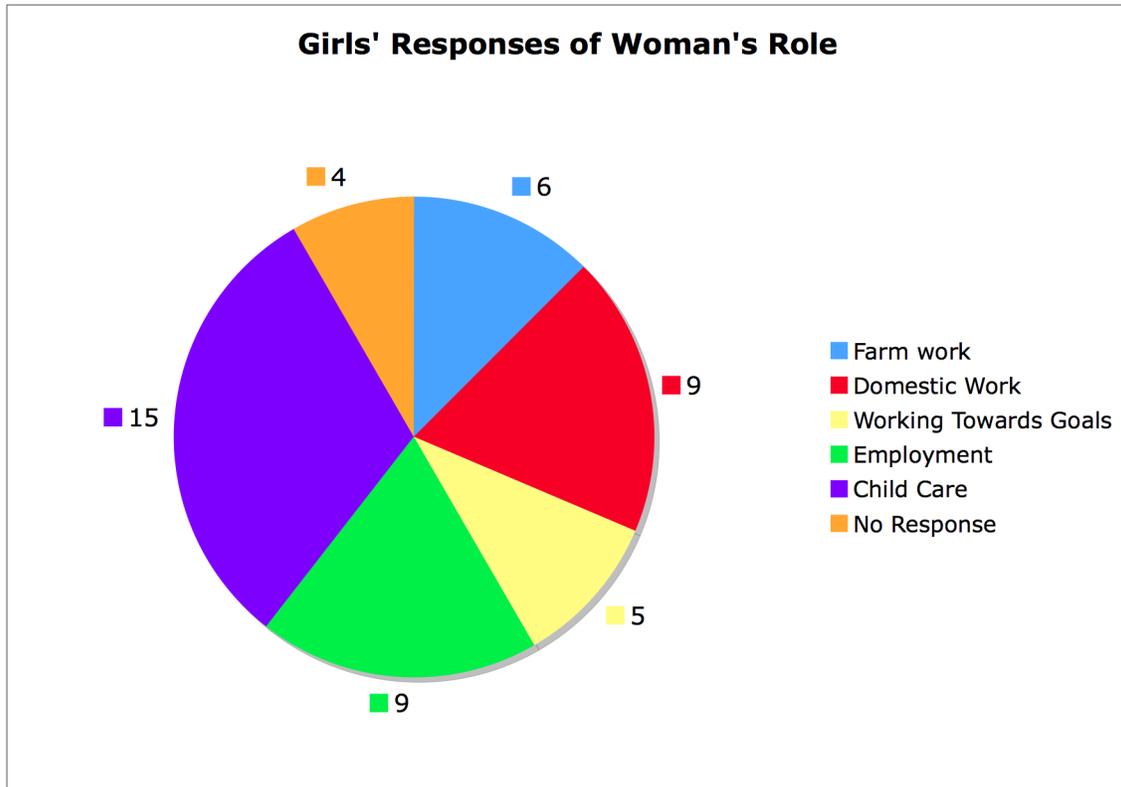
The surveys allow for deeper analysis of society’s interpretation of the gender roles. Questions on the survey to the boys inquired about the role of women in society. One sixteen-year-old boy responded women are primarily seen “Cleaning, cooking mostly gossiping when idol [sic]. Their main role is taking care of the family.” Another participant noted that women usually are “working-chores, cleaning, doing what their husbands want them to do, basically a few are independent.” Yet another writes, “it is like women should do nothing in a family but eat and give birth.”

The graph below demonstrates the distribution of responses from boys surveyed in Shieywe Secondary School, Kakamega High School, and Kakamega Township. Out of 39 participants, the majority of responses (21) from boys surveyed indicated that the primary role of women in the community is to perform domestic work and to raise the

children. A few (7) participants noted that some women work professionally as well as perform household duties. An even smaller number (3) reported that women are employed.



Data from the girls surveyed reveals slightly different, yet still similar, results. Of the 33 girls surveyed, 15 mentioned caring for her children as a woman's main role in society. Nine cited employment or business ventures as a woman's main role. Nine also mentioned housework and domestic duties. Six mentioned farm work. Five mentioned working hard with other women to achieve goals. Some girls mentioned more than one primary role of a woman and they were doubly or triply noted. The graph below displays this data.



Personal observations shed light on notable gender norms. Domestically, men are catered to. When a man returns home from work, a woman of the home (daughter or wife) typically brings a basin of water for hand-washing, chai (tea), and food. This data may not be generalizable to all households, but to the ones that follow traditional practices.

Information from focus groups supported the data from the other sources as well. In the “Young Mothers” focus group, the women expressed their views of gender roles. Men generally are “the head of the family” and “provide security,” “impregnate the women,” and “provide finances for the children in the home.” A woman’s role is “to produce the children and to give birth, they cook and care for the kids.” A woman is “not the head of the house. The responsibility of the mother in the character of the raising of

the children. [sic]" These women also noted farming ("dig plants and vegetables") as a woman's responsibility.

e. Negative Views on Educated Women

Along with these traditional gender roles, there is a negative opinion associated with educating women. If the participant recorded a dislike for educated women in his or her survey, the response referenced either the woman's "arrogance," excessive pride, or propensity to leave her husband. All parents (who were primarily female) reported positive views of educated women except for one male parent. This father wrote that educated women "are very much stubborn. E.g. most of this women has broken their marriages [sic]." One 32-year-old teacher in Matende Secondary School noted of educated women that "most men fear that they are strongheads." One 40-year-old male teacher from Kakamega High School commented that "they are bullies."

The surveyed boys had mixed responses¹⁷. One 16-year-old noted that educated women "are full of pride and if at all they will at least try not to show it then it will be better [sic]. Men will respect them rather than see them like their competitors going to grab all the big jobs available." This is adequately representative of those with negative attitudes towards educated women. Other negative responses include being too financially independent of their husbands, being bullies, being too busy, being arrogant, and being disrespectful of their husbands.

2. Modern Ideological Reform

The work of women's empowerment groups has brought in a new tide of reformed thinking. The effect of this movement is evident in the views of the younger

¹⁷ The positive responses from male participants will be examined in a later section.

generations and influences nearly all aspects of life. These new ideological convictions are established on a favorable image of women's education and women's empowerment. One boy summarizes the situation of Kakamega impeccably and eloquently: "In my community, the main role of women is looking after the house. i.e. traditionally but things are changing nowadays as we usher in a new era of the African woman." Another boy notes that educated women, "are a source of inspiration in the society. For a long time, women have been despised [sic] in society and treated as slaves. But for the educated women, they prove that the work of a women [sic] is not just in the kitchen but they've got brains and also the guts to stand for their rights. To me, they are a big challenge and also an encouragement."

The women of the "Young Mothers" focus group expressed that they disagree with the established gender roles in society. They noted that "the behavior of the children should not just be on the mother. Both should be involved with discipline." While they agreed that "physical security" should come from the man, they believe that financial issues "must involve both parties."

Observable changes as a result of this shifting attitude are present throughout Kenya and Kakamega. For example, in the new constitution (ratified August 2010), women have the right to inherit property. Under the previous constitution, land inheritance was governed by customary law and prevented a woman's rights of matrimonial property. The legalization of women's inheritance of property is symbolic of increased support for women's rights throughout Kenya. This trend is characterized by promotion of women's education, women's employment, delayed age of marriage, and a shift in the understanding of dowry.

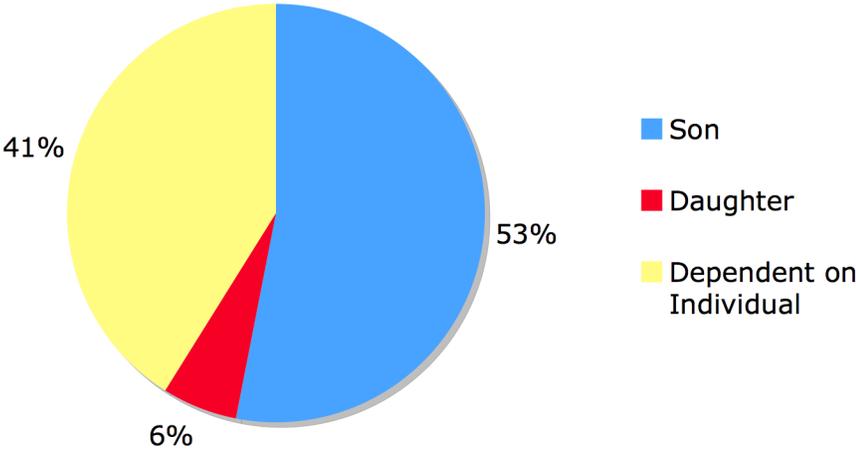
a. *Promoting Women's Education*

Community organizations that promote gender equality are becoming evermore present in Kakamega. Especially among the younger generations, there is a shift in views of educated women. Of the 33 girls surveyed, continued education was mentioned 13 times as future plans. All girls intended to complete high school and many mentioned attending a university.

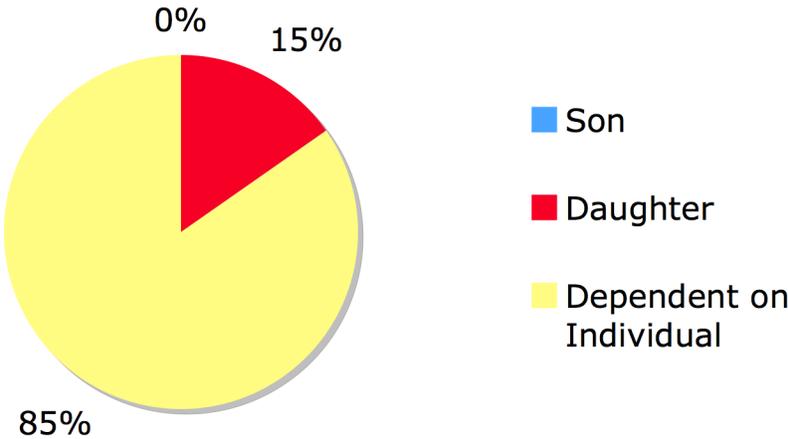
In the Shieywe focus group, one participant noted that “even older people learn and go for masters degrees in the universities once they’re married and have children.” She spoke about the evolving importance of women’s education.

The shift in generational opinions of women’s education was proven through an exercise I conducted in both focus groups. The women were given a hypothetical situation in which each woman had enough money to send only one child to school. They imagined they had one son and one daughter. The options were to send the son to school, send the daughter to school, or base the decision on the characteristics of the individual apart from gender. In the Shieywe focus group, two participants decided to send the girl to school, 11 would have based the decision on the individual characteristics, and none would have sent the boy to school. In the “Young Mothers” focus group, one participant would have sent the girl to school, seven would have based the decision on the individual, and nine would have sent the boy to school.

Decision to Send Child to School Young Mothers Focus Group



Decision to Send Child to School Shieywe Focus Group



Many boys that participated in the surveys had very positive responses to educated women. One boy wrote, “educated women symbolize change in the community.” Another boy from Kakamega Township wrote an “educated woman is independent and can always make productive decision [sic] on her own. She can make the environment where she stays a better place.” One boy from Kakamega High School wrote, “Educated women are focused. They are the light of society and they act as role models for younger women/girls.”

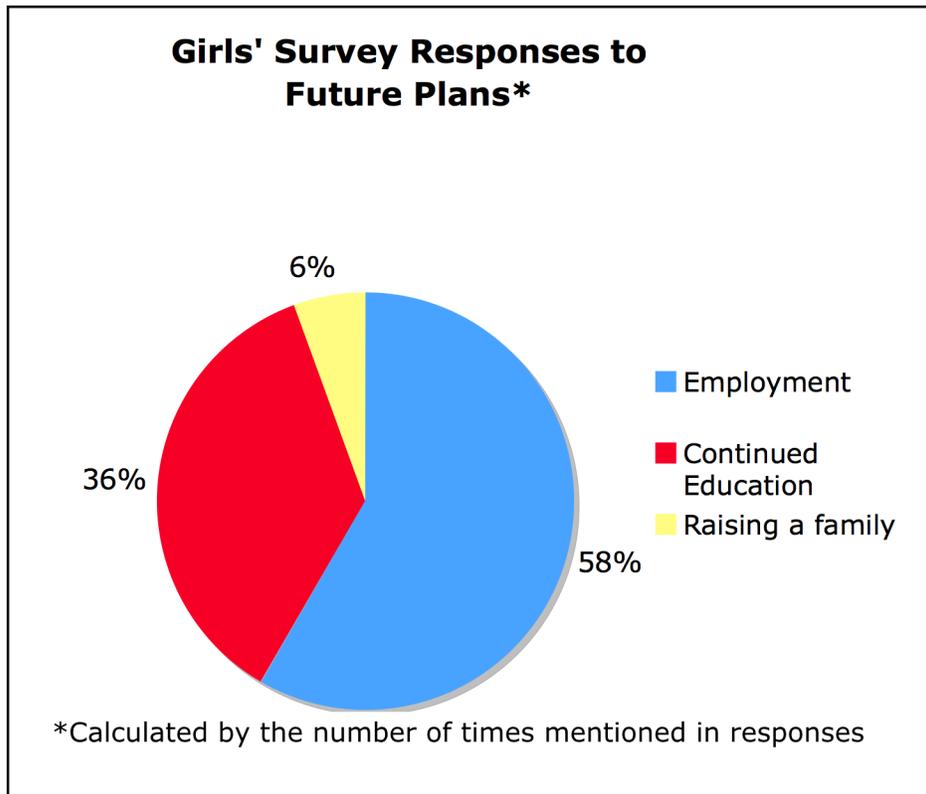
b. Increasing Women’s Employment

The women’s empowerment movement strongly promotes financial independence through employment. There is a shift in the attitude towards women’s employment in both Kakamega at the regional level and in Kenya as a country. Both Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 1 noted in their interviews that new legislation requires 30 percent of all public employment opportunities be reserved for women. Interviewee 2 notes that this “encourages ladies that they know they have some options.”

An increasing number of women and young girls want to secure employment before beginning a family and many men in the community embrace their aspirations. One boy writes in his survey response, “Of late many are undertaking educational courses while other [sic] are business people.” Another male student writes about women, “They do all sorts of things as in they participate in all activities- trading, police officers, etc.”

The survey for the girls in secondary school inquired about plans for the future in. Of the 33 girls surveyed, employment was mentioned 21 times, continued education

was mentioned 13 times, and raising a family was mentioned only twice. The data show that the main priority of secondary school girls in Kakamega is professional employment.



c. Delayed Marriage

Early marriage is a notable problem in the traditional culture of Kakamega. The literature supports the claim that early marriage is associated with low educational attainment and high fertility rates of women (see literature review). However, efforts towards progressive change emphasize delaying marriage. Local women's empowerment organizations promote prolonged education for girls as a means to keep them from marriage. Project Africa, for one, mentors young girls in primary and secondary school on the importance of continued education and the negative effects of early marriage. As women enter the professional field at a larger rate, they delay the marriage process. The

goals of women are shifting away from family and towards financial stability, employment, and reaching personal professional goals.

In a personal interview, Interviewee 2 noted that, “older generations believe that once a girl gets of age, her job is to get married and have children. They younger feel they are educated, independent. They are empowered.” A 15-year-old girl from “Young Mothers” stated in an interview that she does not plan to get married because “family life is stressful.” One 16-year-old girl noted in her interview that she would like to get married around age thirty or forty. Another 16-year-old girl and a 22-year-old girl stated in their respective interviews that they feel they are too young to be married and want to wait until they are older to marry. These are all positive signs of progress towards delayed marriage.

The focus group at Shieywe Secondary School revealed similar trends in attitudes towards delayed marriage. The girls in this focus group noted that early marriage (below the age of 18) is illegal in Kenya. One girl stated, “the police can take you to school by force and the man is arrested.”

d. The Evolution of Dowry

Modern social thought has shaped societal views of dowry as well. Data from the “Young Mothers” focus group suggest that the importance of dowry is diminishing in the progressive and younger generations. One woman cited that in the sixties dowry was extremely important and a major reason for early marriage. While dowry was traditionally understood in terms of the number of animals given or money paid, it has taken on a new role of appreciation. Dowry is now discussed openly between the bride’s parents and the husband as a sign of appreciation from the husband rather than a

contractual obligation. A bride is understood to be less of her husband's property and she has a stronger relationship with her biological family. Additionally, the majority of the women in the focus group were married without a dowry. Their parents did not receive a dowry for their marriage and this reveals the trend of deemphasizing the importance of dowry in marriage.

II. The Effect of Environmental Factors: *Placing Kakamega in its*

Environmental Context

Traditional ideological convictions and modern progressive thought processes are converging in a place with important environmental factors. The aforementioned ideological forces affect the attitudes of residents of Kakamega in the context of various other challenges. The data provide insight into the health problems and financial struggles that shape the opinions of Kakamega residents.

The presence of medical and financial problems alone does not directly create gender disparities in a community. There are numerous communities that face similar environmental detriments, yet do not experience such educational gender disparity.

This section will first defend the existence and severity of these two environmental disadvantages and the final section will explain their role in the resulting gender disparity. The following data proves that financial difficulties create a larger barrier to women's educational attainment than do health difficulties. The data demonstrate that more children reported difficulty attending school because of financial problems than health problems. Additionally, interviews with women who never completed school beyond primary education support this finding. Indirectly, health

problems and financial struggles influence a parent's decision to send a daughter to school.

1. Health Factors

Through the surveys, focus groups, and interviews the data reveal that malaria and HIV/AIDS are the major health concerns in Kakamega. According to the World Malaria Report of 2009¹⁸, 17 percent of those over 5 years old in Kenya are burdened with malaria and 83 percent of those 5 years are younger are affected. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey from 2008-2009, 6.3 percent of people aged 15-49 in Kenya tested positive for HIV-1. Additionally, HIV prevalence was higher for women than men in all age groups except for ages 35-39.

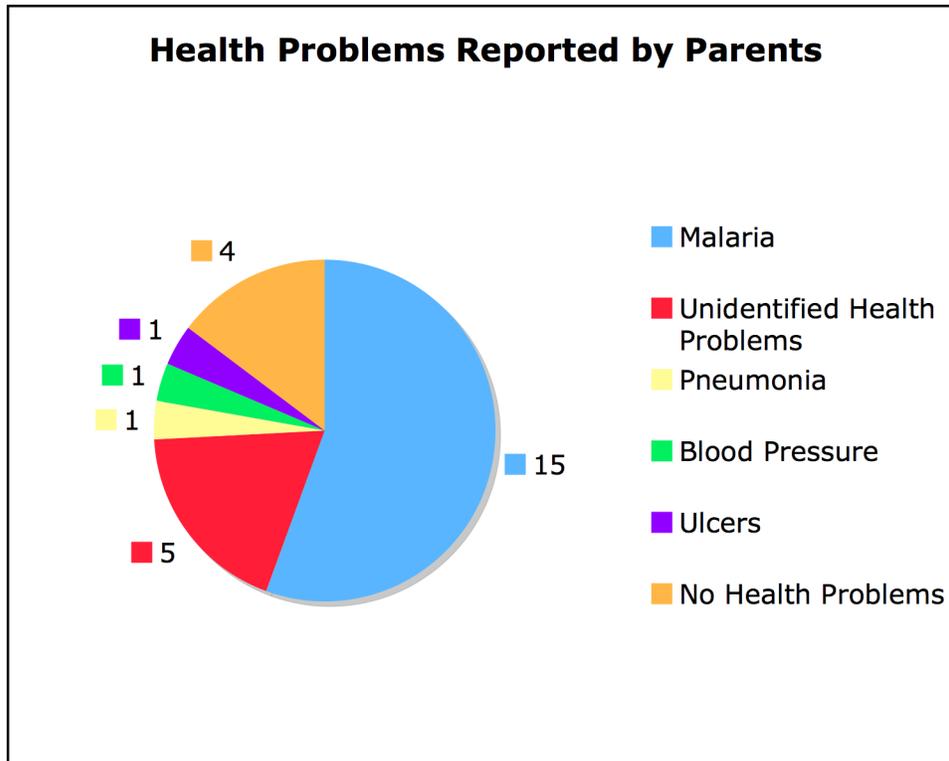
Data from participants in this study is consistent with these public health reports. The primary data indicates that malaria has a more severe and noticeable impact on the daily lives of community members. When describing the effect of health problems on families, most respondents noted the devastating financial effect of these health problems.

a. Malaria

Thirty-one parents of school children were surveyed. One question asked about how health problems have affected their families. Of the 31 parents surveyed, 15 reported that malaria has the most devastating impact on their families. Five reported that health

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- ¹⁸ “The 2009 World Malaria Report summarizes information received from 108 malaria endemic countries and other sources and updates the analysis presented in the 2008 Report. It highlights progress made in meeting the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets for malaria to be achieved by 2010 and 2015, and new goals on malaria elimination contained in the Global Malaria Action Plan (2008).”

issues have been very problematic, but did not specify exact ailments. Four reported that health problems have not affected their families. Pneumonia, blood pressure problems, and ulcers were all mentioned once. The remaining participants did not respond to this question. HIV/AIDS was not mentioned by any participant in the parent survey as having an effect on the family.



b. HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has had a devastating effect on the community; however, most participants did not reference HIV/AIDS as frequently as they did malaria. The 2008-09 KDHS results indicate that 6.3 percent of Kenyan adults are infected with HIV. For women in this age bracket, HIV prevalence is 8.0 percent while for men it is 4.3 percent.

This national data suggest that young women are more affected by HIV as 3 percent of women aged 15-19 are HIV positive while only less than 1 percent of men in that age group are HIV positive. Similarly, HIV prevalence among women aged 20-24 is more than four times greater than that of men aged 20-24. Data from the “Young Mothers” focus group reveal that HIV is not a problem because a child can still attend school. However, AIDS is a problem.

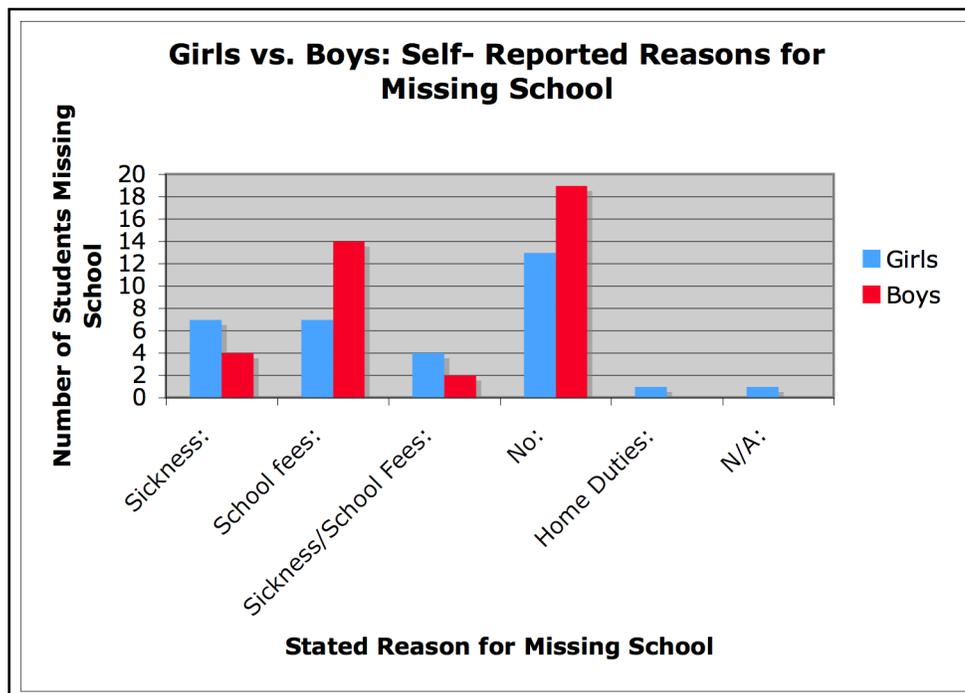
Another health concern entailed children being forced to stay home to care for sick family members. Contrary to the literature, the women in the “Young Mothers” focus group noted that children are not forced to stay home to take care of sick family members. The consensus among the women was that a child must go to school, even if that means the father/husband will take care of the ill person. They noted that health issues are problematic, however, only when the child is sick and cannot attend school.

An interview with Interviewee 2 revealed contrasting data. She noted that when a child is sick, the daughters of the family must stay home from school to care for the sick. She said that it is only the girl child who is pulled from school to provide care. This was based on her observations; however, she did not have specific facts to support this claim.

The difference between these two answers could be attributed to one of two realities. Perhaps the “Young Mothers” did not want to express that their daughters suffer as a result of a sick family member. Another explanation for this informational disparity is that Interviewee 2 may have based her reasoning on assumptions and suppositions rather than fact.

2. Financial Struggles

Primary education is free and mandatory for all children of Kenya. The Kenyan government instituted this change in 2003 in an effort to ensure that financial instability would not prevent any child from receiving a decent education. Despite these efforts, a lack of school fees was the most frequently reported reason for missing school. Through informal conversations, the children of Kakamega explained the cost of books, school supplies, and most importantly, school uniforms, account for this lack of “school fees.” While the tuition may be free, the necessary resources to acquire education are lacking. Additionally, the concept of free education extends to only primary education and does not apply to secondary level education or above. Between primary and secondary education we see a significant increase in dropout rates.



The results of the surveys reveal that boys cited a lack of school fees more frequently than any other reason for missing school. Girls reported both sickness and

school fees as reasons for missing school with equal frequency. Out of 39 boys, 22 reported missing school at least occasionally. Of these 22 boys, 14 reported a lack of school fees as the primary reason. Of 33 girls surveyed, 18 reported missing school at least occasionally. Of these 18, 7 reported school fees as the sole reason for missing school (4 reported a combination of sickness and school fees)¹⁹.

	School Fees	Sickness/ School Fees	Reported Missing Class	Total Surveyed
Boys	14	2	22	39
Girls	7	4	18	33

In the interviews with the “Young Mothers”, six out of seven women cited financial problems as the reason they dropped out of school. These six women reported that a lack of school fees caused them to drop out while only one woman reported health problems as the reason she dropped out of school.

Using the surveys as a primary indicator and the interviews with “Young Mothers” as an auxiliary source, the financial struggle of children in Kakamega is clearly a significant factor in the environmental context. This financial struggle affects educational attainment in regards to the need for school uniforms and supplies in primary education and enrollment fees in secondary education.

¹⁹ (Note that more boys were surveyed than girls. The results express the views of more boys than girls.)

III. Product of the Cultural Process

Kakamega, Kenya, is a society wherein two strong ideological forces collide in an environment of health and financial disadvantages. The reaction of the traditional ideologies with the progressive ideologies in this particular environment creates a unique social product. The final product of these factors is gender disparity in education. However, in translating these ideological and environmental forces into gender disparity, the societal attitudes towards women's education are pivotal. These societal attitudes and understandings are the true product of the community's condition and are the result of complex social processes. Societal attitudes towards women's education are most accurately reflected in the reality of early marriage and its relation to low investment in girl's education, gender dynamics of marriage, a lack of positive female role models, early pregnancy, and ultimately the decision not to send a daughter to school.

1. Early marriage

The data suggests that early marriage is prevalent in Kakamega. Five out of five "Young Mothers" asked about the prevalence of early marriage among women noted that they know a lot of girls who are "too young" to be married. One girl mentioned she knew at least ten girls who are 10 to 12 years old and married. Of these five girls, four mentioned financial constraints as the reason the girl married young. The other girl mentioned bad peer influences and social pressures. This trend has come to be so customary because of the dominance of traditional cultural views in a setting of economic hardship. The combination of the factors detailed in the previous section explains early marriage. One teacher noted, "Furthermore, this phenomenon has severe detrimental effects on gender parity in education. The detriments of early marriage are directly

attributable as well as perpetuated by low investment in girl's education, gender dynamics of marriage, lack of positive female role models, and the pervasiveness of early pregnancy.

a. *Low investment in girl's education*

The outcome of the dominance of traditional views in an economically oppressive environment is a low parental investment in girls. Because those who adhere to traditional beliefs uphold a strong presence in Kakamega, the educational trends generally reflect their decisions. Data from interviews and focus groups indicate that early marriage results in low investment in girl's education. Marriage for a woman (or girl) has so many monetary implications in the traditional Kakamega attitude that financial stability and marriage cannot be separated. One teacher noted, "Most [girls] get married at an early age. They come from poor backgrounds and often parents are unable to support them."

Marriage of a daughter means financial provisions of her husband and consequently, a relief of burden on the parents. When dominantly influenced by traditional views (which is usually the case), parents of a girl see financial potential in her marriage and fewer benefits in investing in her education. Some parents desire to marry away a daughter as soon as possible and therefore her education is irrelevant. Because a wife is considered property of her husband to those who identify with the traditional ideology, once she is married she no longer belongs to her biological family. This cycle creates the impression that the returns to a family of investing in a daughter's education are very low. The result is a tendency to invest in the education of a son over that of a daughter.

The collected data support this assertion. One interviewee explained that “if a family has many children, they will prefer to take the boy [to school].” She continues that there is “more chance when the boy finishes he can take care of the family and the girl will marry away. The boy will stay around and help the family but the girl will marry away and forget the family.” She implies that parents see educated sons as a source of potential financial assistance, while resources would be wasted on girls.

An interview with another participant echoes these findings. Interviewee 1 explained that “women are people who always move out of the family and get married elsewhere. They will develop in their new home. The parents don’t want to invest in the daughter because the investment will go elsewhere.” He also said that as a woman, “we don’t put many resources on you.” The “Young Mothers” expressed similar sentiments in the focus group. One participant claimed that “sometime back the community looked at the boy child when he’s in school and gets an education and well informed, he will take care of the family where he is. The girl who is educated will get married and get a job and bring benefits to the other side.” This sentiment reinforces the claim that daughters are not financial assets to their biological family once they are married and after their dowry has been paid. Early marriage and a low investment in women’s education are interconnected and perpetuate each other in the cycle of gender inequality.

b. Gender Dynamic Within Marriage

Traditional cultural views dictate a very specific gender dynamic within marriage. Data prove women are traditionally in charge of the children and the household duties. Along with this, the woman is considered property of the man and his family. She usually moves away from her biological family to live with her husband’s family.

Dowry is an important part of the marriage dynamic in Kakamega to those who identify with traditional customs. As a result, it is a contributing factor to early marriage and to subsequent gender disparity in education. Early marriage in Kakamega is largely driven by dowry. Parents see opportunities for financial gain through dowry and often force their children into marriage. A participant in the Shieywe focus group commented that parents often “force” their daughters into marriage.

While the existence of dowry as it commodifies women perpetuates the cycle of early marriage, there are positive signs of change. With the new ideological development, dowry is seen as a gesture of appreciation, rather than as a payment. This connotative transformation of dowry symbolizes a shift in the dynamics of marriage, and hopefully a shift in the prevalence of early marriage.

Early marriage leads to lower educational attainment of women because of the nature of marriage dynamics. The predominant traditional culture dictates that marriage is incompatible with education. Once a woman is married, she is no longer free to pursue an education in the traditional cultural constraints. One “Young Mother” that was interviewed commented that a married woman cannot pursue an education because “by that time she is with the family and she has to care for the family and [education] is a problem. She can continue tailoring but not primary or secondary education because she must take care of the family.” Almost all interviewed “Young Mothers” noted that in the current community, a woman’s family is more important than her education and her responsibility is to the former rather than the latter. However, these young women mentioned that to them, their education is more important than marriage or their family (these were younger women than the larger population of “Young Mothers”).

Despite these discouraging realities, the effects of a new ideology are visible in Kakamega as well. Three out of six young women interviewed noted that a married woman cannot go to school. One woman noted that this decision is up to the husband. However, two women believed that it is possible for a married woman to pursue her education. These “Young Mothers” of the younger generation expressed views contrasting to traditional understandings of the compatibility of marriage and education. They represent the presence of an ideological revolution that is a clear sign of progression towards gender parity reflected through modern ideological beliefs.

c. Lack of Positive Female Role Models

The literature suggests that the presence of positive female role models plays an important part in the economic development of a community. In Kakamega, the cultural and environmental circumstances have created a community with very distinct gender roles. These gender roles have generated a cultural climate where very few women are seen as being professionally employed and actors of positive role models for younger girls.

The collected data suggest that the majority of adolescent girls and boys see women in the community fulfilling these gender-designated roles. Typically, both boys and girls reported that women in the community engage in household tasks, childbearing and rearing, and farming. As shown in the graph in the section above both girls and boys reported seeing women primarily doing domestic work. Regardless of the factual number of women engaged in domestic work and the number engaged in income-generating activities, the perceived role of women is domestically inclined. The absence of women

who are economically independent and employed alongside with men has a significant impact on young girls.

The void of positive influential role models funnels girls into the belief that their most attainable option is marriage. With this thought process, an education is not valuable because housewifery is the ultimate destination. Luckily, however, the data prove that there is a shift in the goals of younger women that is more aligned with the modern ideologies.

The convergence of the traditional and modern ideologies is prominent in opinions of female roles and role models. While the overwhelming majority of responses indicated that women are most present in the domestic arena, a few responses noted an emerging dichotomy: women are both working in the home and professionally. One male student wrote, “women are determined to work mostly domestic works and a few dealing with government jobs.” This quote reveals that women are still necessarily in the home, however, few are professionally employed as well. Another male student expresses a similar view: “I see them caring for their children and doing very hard work including office work.” The emergence of this shift in gender roles has led to an increased number of positive female role models. As this ideological revolution continues to affect the area, the number of positive women role models engaged in professional work will increase. Hopefully, this increase will correspond with a slighter prevalence of early marriage.

d. Early Pregnancy

Early pregnancy is common in Kakamega in conjunction with early marriage. Once a woman marries, she is expected to have children. Because traditional societal values dictate that her role within a marriage is to raise children and maintain the house,

she immediately encounters pressure to start a family. Interviewee 1 explained that as a woman a, “young man will want you to give birth immediately. This is the core objective of marriage.”

The financial situation of the community plays into effect because parents view children (especially sons) as potential sources of income. A larger family implies more children to take care of the parents as they age. Even though a daughter is not expected in traditional culture to get a high-paying job, her dowry is a source of payment. For these reasons, young mothers are expected to bear many children immediately after marriage.

Early pregnancy prevents adequate education for girls. If a girl becomes pregnant, she is generally shunned from school. Even if she is not married (in which case she will likely not be in school), girls who are pregnant are expelled from numerous schools. Many girls in the Shieywe focus group shared anecdotes of expulsion of girls who had become pregnant. They noted it was standard procedure to ask them to leave school, often permanently. As long as early marriage and early pregnancy go hand in hand, a girl’s chances at attaining educational equality is low. However, as indicated above, many girls of the younger generations reported education as a higher priority than family and marriage—providing evidence that modern ideological beliefs are slowly taking hold.

CONCLUSION

The reality of the gender disparity in education in Kakamega is the result of many factors. The cultural perception of an educated woman is the product of traditional values and progressively revolutionary ideas combined with financial obstacles and health hindrances. All of these aforementioned factors come together to influence an

individual's understanding of an educated woman. The elements of traditional Kakamega society work together to produce a societal structure that inhibits the educational attainment of girls and a standard that dictates an educational disadvantage for girls of Kakamega. These societal elements have become tremendously intertwined to create this social structure that excludes girls from a proper education. Traditional cultural mores and understandings dictate a state of existence wherein the girl is constantly trapped in this cycle of disadvantage against her male counterpart.

Tradition created specific gender roles particularly within a marriage, but also in the greater society, that have greatly influenced society's view of an educated woman. Kakamega is a community wherein tradition is extremely important in shaping the cultural landscape. Change away from tradition is a slow process and often encounters much resistance. Kakamega residents highly value traditional ideals and the traditional set of beliefs shapes all aspects of the culture. Unfortunately for women's empowerment groups, tradition dictates that women should be homemakers and child caretakers and not educated, financially independent women.

Tradition continues to have such a large influence and change is slow to actualize because of the unique situation of Kakamega. There are distinct signs of European and American influence, however, for the most part, Kakamega is relatively self-contained. It is a small town and most people live far from the city center. People are relatively isolated from the influences outside of the community. Because of this, ideas of progressive change in relation to women's education are slow to reach and consequently influence community members. Tradition has survived for so long because of the lack of

infrastructure that slows communication and does not allow for a quick and efficient dissemination of newer ideas.

Religion is one of the most influential factors in this traditional concept of an educated woman, and thus in society's concept of an educated woman. Religion is a large part of the culture in Kakamega—for both those who follow the more traditional beliefs and for those who follow a more modernized approach. While Christianity is the predominant religion, all religious beliefs in Kakamega have large influences on community members. Religion affects most decisions for the majority of people in Kakamega, and thus shapes an individual's understanding of an educated woman. A surprisingly large number of people in this study believe Christianity dictates that God created a position of subservience to men for women. Women are not to be the head of the household and are to acquiesce to the desires of husbands. With this, education is not to be their primary concern—their husband and their household is.

The economic crisis in Kakamega is a catalyst in the cycle of educational deprivation. A lack of funds keeps girls trapped in a cycle without education for a variety of reasons. The most basic reason is that families struggle with school fees necessary for a girl to go to school. Primary education is free—however, costs associated with school uniforms, books, and materials inhibit female attendance. If a girl child does manage to complete primary education, finances will likely prohibit her from continuing her education. Secondary education is not free and a large number of girls drop out of school when school fees are imposed. This is the area wherein finances interact with social norms to disadvantage girls. Many parents or grandparents choose not to send their

daughter to school, while they send their son because they do not value the education of a girl as highly as that of a boy.

Early marriage is by far the most significant factor keeping girls in this disadvantaged cycle. Traditional culture creates a society that all but forces a girl into early marriage. This same society condemns the girl to dependence and educational remission once she enters the early marriage. Society has created such strong gender roles in a marriage that the girl usually has no option but to sacrifice her education to become a mother, wife, and housekeeper.

Efforts towards progress in gender parity have made a considerable impact on the culture of Kakamega. In this regard, the society's mentality is shifting. Especially among the younger generation, people are moving away from a traditional understanding of an educated woman and towards a modern understanding. As a direct effect of certain progressive movements, society's culture is changing. Seeds of progressive change are evident in a greater appreciation of an educated woman. Those most responsible for this change are women's empowerment groups—which primarily consist of local organizations and NGOs. Community-based efforts have a significant influence on this cultural understanding. Their active role in the community's culture brings about an acceptance of the benefits of educated women. These groups are small in size, but are effective in advocating for women's independence financially, matrimonially, and professionally.

Research vs. Literature Predictions:

The literature effectively served to identify categories by which to evaluate the community's perception of women's education. This study was crafted with these

categories in mind to guide the direction and the method of evaluation. Based on the initial literature review, certain factors promised to be of the greatest influence. While the results proved that certain factors were just as important as the literature predicted, there were notable deviations. The literature predicted certain factors would influence society's perception of women's education more than they actually did. On the other hand, certain factors mattered more in shaping the cultural composition than the literature indicated.

Predicted, but Insignificant Factors:

Taking into account the findings from the published literature, I expected to find that household responsibilities and HIV would have a larger effect on perceptions of women's education and on a girl's educational attainment. However, the data suggests that these did not have a great effect. Not one child mentioned household responsibilities as a reason for missing school. Based on my knowledge of the region, I attribute this difference to the urbanization and economic development processes present in Kakamega. Household responsibilities may be deemed more important for girls to attend to in a more rural setting than in Kakamega. Because this research focused on the inhabitants of Kakamega Town, most people were privileged to have access to basic necessities like running water and electricity. I suspect that more rural towns must rely on a child (daughter) to help with these basic household duties.

The literature suggested that HIV would similarly have a much larger effect than the data shows and malaria would have a lesser effect. Malaria was much more frequently cited as the biggest health concern and cause of missing school than HIV/AIDS. I would account for this difference again by the relative development of

Kakamega to sites examined in the literature. The health and medical system of Kakamega Town is relatively more developed and effective than those of less developed communities in Kenya. Additionally, I observed that other illnesses were often misunderstood to be malaria. The results may be faulty in that a participant may have believed to have malaria, but instead had another illness (one woman claimed to have self-diagnosed malaria, when she was in actuality pregnant).

Surprising Factors of Importance:

The data elucidated the underestimated importance of certain factors: religion and positive women role models. I believe the significance of religion was widely underestimated and under-represented in the literature because religion is so closely intertwined with culture. It is difficult to distinguish between what understandings are attributable to religion and which are attributable to culture. Someone may easily mistakenly attribute an expressed opinion to “culture,” while the root of that opinion may in fact be based in religion.

The second factor that I found to be surprisingly significant was the presence of positive female role models. The literature did not stress the serious detriments towards gender parity that a lack of positive female role models has. In this research study, the data pertaining to views of a woman’s role in society is very telling of the gender inequality. I believe the literature did not adequately express this importance because it is easy to overlook the connection between understood gender roles and female role models.

Shortcomings of the Literature:

The results of this study did not precisely reflect the findings in the literature. There were clear disconnects between the literature predictions and the study conclusions. These shortcomings of the literature are attributable to differences between characteristics of Kakamega and characteristics of communities the literature was based on and the effect of time since the literature studies were conducted. The literature underestimated the effect of progressive women's empowerment movements in the community. Organizations devoted to women's empowerment and gender equality are widely present throughout Kakamega and are having an increasingly significant impact on the communal values. The literature drew conclusions for communities that did not have such a strong presence of these types of progressive movements. The literature adequately predicted factors that affect a traditional understanding of women's education.

Part of this disconnect arises from the reality that Kakamega is not an extremely rural community. Many communities highlighted in the literature are rural communities. Many are nearly completely isolated from outside influence, which prevents change multi-cultural exchange. Much of Kakamega is rural, however, the center of Kakamega Town is fairly urbanized (very slight comparable to high-income countries).

Limitations of Research:

This study was crafted to be as comprehensive as possible and to generate the most accurate results. However, there were notable obstacles to attaining the most accuracy that account for limitations to the study's findings. Most of the limitations are a result of the cultural disconnect between myself, as an American foreign researcher, and the local Kakamega community members. The outsider/insider dynamic may have

affected the responses of participants. Because I was not an indigenous member of the community, it is possible that feelings of distrust or miscommunication were present in local participants. The dynamic of a foreign researcher from America collecting data from a population of locals in Kenya may have fostered a cultural disconnect that may compromise a degree of the accuracy of the results. However, the degree of this effect is impossible to determine.

The first limitation to this study results from the distinct cultural and linguistic barrier between myself (the researcher) and the participants. While I made as much of an effort as possible to minimize the negative effects of possible miscommunication, misunderstandings were unavoidable to some degree. Almost everyone who participated in the study had a basic understanding of English. The children were especially proficient because school is taught in English. However, communication was more of a problem with the older and less-educated generation, as Kiswahili is the language of tongue. Some participants misunderstood certain survey questions. While this was not very prevalent, it was obvious in some of the responses that were not appropriate for the question asked. They demonstrated a lack of understanding of the question prompt.

The most significant presence of linguistic misunderstanding was in the interviews with the “Young Mothers” and the “Young Mothers” focus group. Both of these processes had to involve an interpreter. While the interpreter was fluent in English and Kiswahili, it is possible that some of what the participants intended to communicate may have been lost in translation. In the focus group, the translator had to translate my prompt into Kiswahili to the women, listen to their responses, and then summarize and best translate their opinions into English. While I am confident in her ability to translate

as accurately as possible, any research that requires a translator runs a risk of miscommunication.

The second limitation to the research involves the survey responses from the children. The results may be faulty for two predominant reasons. Firstly, children may have based their answers on what they believed I, as the researcher, wanted to hear from them. The child participants had access to a description of the research and the purpose of the study. Made explicit in this description was the fact that the results were for use in an American university. Knowing that America generally promotes gender equality in education, the children may have fabricated or exaggerated their responses. They may have responded in a way of what they believed to be the “right” answer. I do not believe this is a serious concern, however, because there was a large variety of answers recorded in the collected data—indicating that there was not all children were artificially answering according to a perceived “correct” response. Secondly, children may have not answered honestly because of their low level of maturity. Especially among boys, it is possible that the child participants did not take the survey seriously and answered outlandishly. When I spoke with the principal of Kakamega High School, he addressed this concern—that some boys may have written humorous answers and not approached the questions seriously.

The third limitation is with the surveys of the adults. Answers may not be entirely accurate as it is possible that they, too, were attempting to answer “correctly.” For example, a parent may not want to list the household responsibilities assigned to his or her child for fear they may be frowned upon in the United States (where participants

knew the information would be used). Parents may also have been hesitant to record their low income or low educational attainment.

The final notable limitation to the results of this study is a general degree of cultural disconnect attributable to the length of my stay. My research project in Kenya had a duration of only two months. Two months is small amount of time to attain an adequate cultural understanding. This short time span may have limited my understanding of culture in Kakamega. My cultural and societal interpretations may not have been as fully informed as they would have been, had I lived in the community longer.

Further Research

There is a need for further future research. One suggestion for this research is a cross-generational study. This sort of research would illuminate how perceptions of women's education are changing across generations and thus, across time. The results would exemplify the temporal changes occurring in Kakamega and the shifting cultural landscape. More specifically, this future research would examine grandparents' attitudes towards women's education, parents' attitudes, and finally children's attitudes. With this, the research could identify exactly which aspects of the cultural perspective are changing. For example, do the younger generations have a different interpretation of their religion as it affects women's education than their parents or grandparents do? Do the younger generations have a different perspective on marriage dynamics or financial responsibility or child rearing? A cross-generational study would illuminate the answers to these questions.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study very strongly support certain policy implications. Were there no policy recommendations as a result of this work, the findings would be irrelevant. The most important aspect of all policy recommendations is community involvement. To catalyze positive improvement most effectively and more appropriately, the community must be at the heart of all efforts. Too often do foreign organizations, governments, or individuals attempt to change the course of a community with little or with uninformed regard for the needs and assets of the community itself. My work with FSD as well as at Duke University has highlighted time and time again the necessity of creating change with the community and not simply for the community. Needs assessment and asset mapping are indispensable in this process and lay the foundation for appropriate action. Cultural incompetence of foreign intervention often leads to disastrous results and leaves in its wake more harm than good. For this reason, I cannot stress enough the necessity of community involvement at all levels of policy change.

Keeping the benefit of community involvement in mind, I recommend implementing an educational policy that stresses the benefits of educating women to children in school, especially boys. The younger boys were more resistant to educational equality than the young girls were. Educating them about the economic and community benefits to achieving gender parity in education would generate positive attitudes among them. This could be done in the form of adding another class to the curriculum that pertains to social relations, community development, and global perspectives. Giving children access to a global perspective and global ideas will allow for the positive change needed for gender parity in education.

Another necessary step involves legislation to promote gender equality in the professional sector. Currently, legal policy requires that 30 percent of government positions be filled by women. The Kenyan government must create more standards similar to this one to ensure that women are well represented in all professional sectors. Gender discrimination cannot occur in employment. Positive female role models who symbolize women employed outside of the home strongly influence young girls. A strong presence of employed women will break the cycle that keeps girls at home and will open up to them possibilities beyond domestic and child-care work. To do this, the government must impress upon the professional sectors regulations to employ a higher percentage of women and to practice more gender equal employment practices.

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APPENDIX: Research Instruments:

Appendix A: Surveys

Survey 1: Girls in secondary school

In total I surveyed 33 girls from Matende Secondary School, Shieywe Secondary School, and Kakamega Township.

1. What is your age?
2. How often do you attend school?
3. Do you miss school? How often? What is the usual reason you miss school?
4. How far away do you live from school?
5. Do you have household responsibilities? If so, what are your household responsibilities (cooking, cleaning, getting food and water)?
6. How many brothers do you have? How many sisters do you have? How many younger and older siblings do you have?
7. What do you think you will do next year? Where do you think you will be in twenty years?
8. If you have brothers, what do you think they will do in twenty years?
9. What do you see women in your community doing? What is their main role?
10. What religion do you practice? How important is the religion in your daily life and beliefs?
11. Does your religion affect your views of the roles of men and women in society? If so, how do it affect your views?
12. If you plan to marry, when do you plan to get married? Why do you want to be married?
13. Do you think that girls in your community get married when they are too young? If so, what do you think is the main reason?
14. What do you think of educated women?

Survey 2: Boys in secondary school

In total I surveyed 39 boys from Kakamega High School, Shieywe Secondary School, and Kakamega Township.

1. What is your age?
2. How often do you attend school?
3. How often do you miss school? If you do, what is the usual reason you miss school?
4. How far away do you live from school?
5. Do you have household responsibilities? If so, what are your household responsibilities (cooking, cleaning, getting food and water)?
6. How many brothers do you have? How many sisters do you have? How many younger and older siblings do you have?
7. What do you think you will do next year? Where do you think you will be in twenty years?
8. If you have sisters, what do you think they will be doing in twenty years?
9. What do you see women in your community doing? What is their main role?

10. What religion do you practice? How important is the religion in your daily life and beliefs?
11. Does your religion affect your views of the roles of men and women in society? If so, how do it affect your views?
12. At what age do you want to get married? Why do you want to get married?
13. When you are married, do will you be more financially responsible for your family than your wife?
14. What do you think of educated women?

Survey 3: Parents of children interviewed

In total I surveyed 31 parents from children in Matende Secondary School, Shieywe Secondary School, and Kakamega Township.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your annual income?
3. Are you the only parent in the home?
4. How much education has the mother of the household had?
5. How many of your daughters and sons live in your house?
6. How many of your daughters and sons go to school?
7. If you have a daughter, do you send her to school? Why or why not?
8. If you have a daughter, at what age would you like her to get married?
9. If you have a son, do you send him to school? Why or why not?
10. Who does most of the housework (cooking, cleaning, food gathering)? Why?
11. Has health or diseases (such as HIV/AIDS or malaria, etc) affected your family? How have they affected your family?
12. What religion do you practice? How important is the religion in your daily life and beliefs?
13. Does your religion affect your views of the roles of men and women in society? If so, how do it affect your views?
14. What is the role of the women in the household and what is the role of the men?
15. What do you think of educated women?

Survey 4: Teachers of interviewed students

In total I surveyed 18 parents from children in Matende Secondary School, Kakamega High School, Shieywe Secondary School, and Kakamega Township. (Note that certain questions only apply to the all girls' school, the all boys' school, and the co-ed school and questions were included on different surveys accordingly.)

1. What is your age?
2. How many female students do you teach?
3. How many male students do you teach?
4. In general, how well do you think your female students perform?
5. In your opinion, do you think one gender performs better than the other on standardized tests?
6. What do you think the girls will do once they graduate?
7. What do you think the boys will do once they graduate?
8. In your opinion, what subjects are girls best suited for?

9. In your opinion, what subjects are boys best suited for?
10. Do you think the girls should continue their education after secondary school? Why or why not?
11. In your opinion, would you prefer to teach one gender over the other? Why or why not?
12. What religion do you practice? How important is the religion in your daily life and beliefs?
13. Does your religion affect your views of the roles of men and women in society? If so, how do it affect your views?
14. What do you think of educated women?

Appendix B: Template for Interviews

Interview with “Young Mothers”

1. What is your education level?
2. What age did you drop out of school?
3. Why did you drop out of school?
4. Who did you live with while you were at school?
5. Did your parents support your education?
6. Are you married? At what age did you get married?
7. Why did you want to get married?
 - a. Financial stability-Dowry
 - b. Stigmas of being single
 - c. Pregnancy
 - d. Parental influence
8. How educated is your husband?
9. Do you have children?
10. Did your parents want you to get married?
11. Were you ever employed? If so, when and why did you stop?
12. Would you go back to school if you had enough money?
13. Would your husband support your education?
14. Do you think Kenyan women can be married and pursue an education at the same time?
15. Do you know a lot of girls who get married early?
 - a. What do you think is the cause of early marriage? Financial struggle
16. What do you think of single unmarried women?
17. Do you think that a woman’s first responsibility is to her husband and children more than her education?
18. Have health problems affected your education?

Interview with Education Officials:

1. What was the origin of the disparity between women's education and men's education?
2. What role does religion play in creating a gap in educational attainment?
3. What is the relationship between early marriage and low educational attainment of women? What is the cause of this early marriage?
 - a. Does early marriage come from financial distress or from stigmas about being single? What about religion?
4. What role does health have in attitudes towards educating women?
 - a. Ex: if there are sick family members, is the girl expected to miss school to care for them? Why?
5. What would you say is the correlation between a mother's education and her decision to send her daughter to school?
6. What is the educational system like in Kenya? How does the public schooling work in terms of fees and attendance?
7. How much do you think financial struggle plays a role in under attendance of girls in secondary school?
8. What is the biggest challenge facing women and girls who want to attain an education?
9. How long do you think this change in attitude towards women's education has been coming? What is the timeframe of evolution of attitudes?
10. In what concrete ways have the rights of women changed?
11. In what concrete ways have the opinions towards women's education changed?
12. Do you notice a difference in the opinions of the older generations and the younger generations?
13. Are there still people who are against women's education? Who?
14. In your opinion, what are the greatest benefits to women's education?
15. What is the best way to affect people's opinions of women's education?
16. What resources do you think women need to gain equal education?
17. Do you feel that people understand the importance of women's education for community economic development?
18. What do you think is the next step towards improving gender parity in education?