

East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature

(An Open Access, International, Indexed, Peer-Reviewed Journal)

A Publication of East African Scholars Publisher, Kenya

www.easpublisher.com

Original Research Article

The Tragedy of the Boy Child amid Souring Girl Child Empowerment

Nyangena Emily Moraa

St, Paul's University Nairobi, Kenya

*Corresponding Author

Nyangena Emily Moraa

Email: moraakem@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 25.08.2018 | Accepted: 20.09.2018 | Published: 30.09.2018 | DOI: 10.36349/easjehl.2018.v01i01.003

Abstract: The consistent campaign for awareness of girl's empowerment seems to be working but at the cost of the boy child. Extensive analysis of data indicates that boy child is neglected entirely and has lost his place in the society. In Kenya today we have more girls in school as compared to boys and the girls do better academically as compared to boys. Never before had enrolment of girls in any primary school grade nationally had exceeded that of boys. This impedes the achievement of Universal Primary Education, which is Millennium Development Goal, number two that by 2015 ensure that all boys and girls alike complete primary schooling. This study seeks to examine the place of the boy child in the society of today. The study adopted a descriptive survey design involving many stakeholders. Data was collected using questionnaires administered to respondents that included county children officers, labour officers, probation officers, county directors of education and county commissioner. Focus Group Discussions were held with chiefs, head teachers, teachers, as well as the youth. The study also collected secondary data from past reports within county offices and schools. The data was collected and analyzed. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. This study found out that the perception that the boy child losing his position in the society is valid. The society has place a high premium on the girl child over the boy child through interventions and programs, which have rendered the boy child prone to low self-esteem and loss of confidence. To cover up all this, the boy child has resulted to vices like crime, drug abuse, terrorism, truancy among others. The study recommended that; there should be regular reviews to find out whether it is the boy or girl who needs an intervention based on varying cultural, biological, economic and regional consideration and, the programmes and intervention that support empowering of women and girls must engage men and boys as well.

Keywords: Tragedy, Boy Child, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, there is growing feelings that, after many years of focusing on girls, the boys have been left behind. That has been evidenced by widespread alcoholism and increased school dropouts, leading to a re-think on whether the advancement by girls was at the expense of boys. Although we appreciate, the efforts made at the girl-child empowerment after years of gender imbalance and inequity, in the past five years or so, there has been much discussion of the boy-child, with some people even alleging that he has been neglected. Sixty percent of the best students in the KCSE examination last year were girls, eliciting heated debate on the place of boys in the country. It is important we advocate for our focus on the child and not the girl or the boy, just the child. Boys and girls each have unique challenges and potentials in the society, which comprise of culturalisation and biological, among others (UNESCO, 2010).

Since independence, the Kenyan government has been following policies geared towards social equality and non-discrimination. In the education sector, considerable efforts have been made to ensure that regional, special needs and gender disparity are all addressed but statistics from various counties in the country show that the girl child has been fore grounded at the expense of the boy child (Bundi, 2018). There has been a traditional thinking of the natural strength in the society today. The strength to handle challenges and hardship of life, the strength to face all menace of humanity and the focus has shifted to the girl child-talk of the empowering and all sort of support, the boy child is now in danger of losing value in the set-up. You will hear of women talk in every sphere and no one is talking about the boys or men. From government support to society focus, the boy, the man is out of picture (Government of Kenya, 2013). African society had norms in the past, which had great impact of infringement on the rights of the girl child. She had no place in the all-male dominated fields of employment

Copyright @ 2018: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non commercial use (NonCommercial, or CC-BY-NC) provided the original author and source are credited.

and handling issues of great concern to the community. She was a house manager, until the continent woke up to realize that all genders can be equal and deserve equal opportunities; that is where it began raining on the boy child. The attention balance tilted much to the girl side and suddenly the man was out of the picture (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2015).

Gender equality needs to be 50 -50 in the sense that there is no view of one gender being weaker than the other is. Equality is not equal when there is allocation of resources on one side of the balance than the other. When there are, more opportunities placed in favor of one side than the other (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2003). Several policies, Acts and statutes define children differently. United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines a child as everyone below the age of 18. In this study, boy child is defined as a male child below the age of eighteen years.

Gender equity is the practice of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, access and control of resources, responsibilities, power, opportunities and services. It is specifically the elimination of all forms of discriminations based on gender.

Problem Statement

In Kenya, we are experiencing an increase in the number of boys dropping out of school. During a typical lecture session in campuses across the country, most of the occupants taking these classes are women, which begs the question; where are their counterparts. Furthermore, crime rate is on the rise and the highest number of individuals behind bars mostly consists of young men. The menace of Drug and Substance abuse has never reached alarming levels as the situation stands currently. We are on the brink of a crisis if stakeholders do not make an effort to mitigate the situation as per now. Stakeholders in this context include the family unit, religious and learning institutions, policy makers, mentors, and generally the society as a whole. This is the reason why this study is examining the unfinished business of the boy child. Why is the boy child neglected, this is the question this study sought to answer.

The Kenyan Perspective of Gender

In the African culture and Kenya in particular, it is our tradition to see a boy child since is young age to be independent. Many a times we use the phrase, "he's a man, he can take care of himself" more especially when thing go wrong on the side of the boy child. Today, boys are likely to drop out of school. They are more likely to abuse drug, in some African countries, the boy child is 20 times prone to imprisonment as compared to the girl child and we take it as normal (Ministry of Education Science and

Technology, 2009). This is the opposite when the girl child is in a problem because it becomes everybody's problem (Bundi, 2018). For example as early as when a child is in grade six, teacher as well as parents will start preparing a girl child on how to grow into a useful woman, while the boy child grow without a model or direction. The society assumes that the boy child is an aggressor and does not need someone to help them transit into manhood (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2014).

At this point, the fight for gender equality becomes a utopian concept. It becomes difficult to compare the incomparable. Biologically, boys are wired differently from girls. The intersection between modernity and traditional practices has put the boy child into a wilderness of identity. Traditionally a man was expected to be stoic, strong, and productive. The society of today argues that "what a man can do a woman can do better" (Kenya Government of Kenya, 2012). This has exposed both genders to constant competition instead of complementing each other as God's plan from the beginning.

How Over-Empowering the Girl Child Has Killed the Boy Child

Today everyone is expected to be in the front to support all activities geared towards developing the girl child but again we would like our children to have equal opportunities and none of them should feel neglected, neither intimidated or discriminated. We want our children from both genders to know that they are both equal before man and God. We should all join hands and support for better future wives and husbands. We should empower the boy child to strengthen the future fathers. It is sad that the boy child has to choose his own future and chart his course without much guidance from the society (Government of Kenya, 1998). This neglect is noticed. In his bid to find his bearing, the boy child has now turned to vices such as drugs and substance abuse, sexual abuse and dropping out of school. The boy child is going to be no more just like the white rhinos in Africa if empowerment programmes continue to neglect the boy-child and out of frustration will push him to underground criminal activities (Hamasi, 2018).

Reports of boys joining terror gangs and terror groups such as Al-Shabab fill the media every time an attack is reported. Some parents remain wondering how their innocent boys came to think of joining such a dangerous group but what do we expect of them if all we concentrate on is the girl and keep telling the boys be a man and stand up for yourself. We have to realize that enough is enough and stand up and protect a species of humans that is slowly degrading out of our own ignorance (Muchemi, 2018).

Both genders are equally important for the success of the society, country, and world at large. Boys need counseling and guidance through their passage to manhood just like girls. Conversations of how we can support the boy child should start at the family level. If we allow the boy-child to continue struggling with poverty, unemployment, and dependency will expose our country to suffer economically and lose the contribution of a major part of the society.

There are numerous initiatives worldwide seeking to empower the girl child and women as a whole. While the boy child, son, brother, man, husband, father is ignored and ends up suffering in silence. Some of these initiatives in Kenya include; Florence Nightingale International Foundation, Girl Child Education Support Initiative, Girl's, and Women's Education Initiative, Girl Child Art Foundation Campus Initiative, Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation-Girl Child Support, Samburu Girls Foundation and many more. Most of them seek to support orphaned girl child, and yet boy child is equally orphaned. Breast cancer is a big concern worldwide (Amutabi & Lutta-Mukhebi, 2001). In fact, the whole month of October is dedicated to breast cancer. In male its equivalent could be prostate cancer which men suffer quietly and not many in the public domain are aware of it. Others widely publicized in the females favor include fistula, cervical cancer, and uterine fibroids. More opportunities are prioritized to women even in circumstances where both sexes are vulnerable regardless of gender. This is even displayed in the Kenyan constitution (2010) on representation especially in the senate for the position of Women Representative whereas there is no man representative position (Juma, 2009).

From a tender age in our African rural setting, boys are left to do the hard family works like tending the farm, spending the whole day in the sun, rain, and strong wind herding livestock, helping at the quarry breaking stones and the likes. All these deny them time to go to school, exposing them to risky health conditions and at times death. Whereas on the contrary, girls are more favored doing the soft normal household chores, more encouraged to pursue education, provided with proper sanitation and more so maximum protection from the harsh African traditions against them by various organizations and initiatives (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2009).

It is right to support and encourage the flourish of girl child and women, but what about the boy child. Is it possible to have similar organizations to protect the boy child? On 10th of December, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights which described all human beings as equal

and deserves equal opportunities, respect and recognition of their rights disregard of sex, age, race, language, color, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Nzioka, 2018). This was later on seen to be contradicted by the Fourth World Conference on Women dubbed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action held on 15th of September 1995 in Beijing China; which had emphasis on privileges towards girl child and women development (Government of Kenya, 2011).

As the world cries of gender equality in favor of the females, a question goes unanswered, how equal is equality, or if there is a striking line in between. Maybe this equality has been surpassed and the cry needs to shift to favor the males. There is also the surplus in various areas whereby what used to be the man's best is now the woman's best. For instance, when announcing the 2010 KCPE results on 28th December, 2010 the Minister of Education Prof. Sam Ogeri emphasized a worrying trend of reduced numbers of boys who did the examination in Central, Eastern and Nairobi provinces then as compared to higher numbers of girls. This raises questions on the accessibility of education by the boy child (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). The mentorship programs and television shows are all geared towards women; "Victoria Lounge, Daughters of Zion, Chanuka Dada (arise sister) just but to mention a few. Where are 'Victor Lounge', 'Sons of Zion', 'Chanuka Kaka' (arise brother)? What about Men Enterprise Fund, Kenya Men Finance Trust, Youth people with disability and Men? Above all these, men are expected to be the bread winner. This scenario leaves many questions unanswered more especially on the common crusade of today of gender equality (Government of Kenya, 2010).

At first, it was the girl child that was at stake (Chege & Sifuna, 2006). The few women who had managed to get educated started vigorous campaigns to empower the girl child. They went with the adage that 'you empower a man you empower an individual and you empower a woman you empower a family and consequently, the whole society. Organisation such as maendeleo ya wanawake (women merry go-rounds) were set up for this cause. This has yielded good results. Women are a more empowered lot (Government of Kenya, 2010). They can take any job and responsibility since they are educated. Even jobs that were thought to be a preserve of their male counterparts have women taking them. Today it is normal to find a woman pilot or engineer unlike some decades back.

However, the empowering of women has led to men being left feeling powerless since they are traditionally used to being the big guns around. It also means the boys were ignored since they were viewed as less vulnerable compared to the girls (Kiunacarol,

2018). A parent with two teenagers of both sexes will be more protective over the girl and completely ignore the boy to take care of himself. This forces boys to engage in criminal activities such as drug abuse and terrorism. Consumption of illicit brews by young men is common in some areas in central province today. In Kenya, it's common for women to protest that their husbands cannot effectively perform their conjugal duties due to consumption of illegal brews which has rendered them helpless. This has been caused by constant neglect over the years causing the young men to feel disempowered compared to the women (United Nations, 1989). In Nyeri County, some mixed schools have been converted to girls boarding schools leaving the boy child out.

Disintegration of the family unit has also been a contributing factor. Many men are absconding their parental roles leaving male children without role models on how to behave as men. The young men are left to find their way out (United Nation, 1995). At the same time, the empowered women are pressurizing their husbands for higher standards of living that both cannot afford. This has stressed men who have consequently resorted to drugs and alcohol to escape the trouble. These empowered women have even resulted to battering their husbands more especially when they are drunk (Kiunacarol, 2018). Some of them have even chopped off their penises. The family being the basic unit of the society, the male gender is a key figure in the family. The responsibility of a man in the family cannot be replaced by a woman and its high time the society realized this for betterment and its wellbeing.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design involving many stakeholders. Data was collected using questionnaires administered to respondents that included children officers, labour officers, probation officers, county directors of education and county commissioners, county. Focus Group Discussions were held with chiefs, head teachers, teachers, as well as the youth. The study also collected secondary data mainly statistics from various county offices and schools. The responses were collected and analyzed. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using simple percentages to draw inferences.

Findings

This study found out a number of factors leading to the neglect of the boy child in the Kenyan society as discussed below.

Perceptions of the Status of the Boy Child in the Gender equality Agenda

Majority (95%) of the respondents agreed that the boy child is lagging in the gender equality agenda whereas 5% disagreed. According to the respondents,

the boy is lagging behind because there has been over-focus on the girl child by the Government and NGOs in terms of programmes and interventions to empower the girl child. In most Counties, informants expressed concern that the boy child was being excluded in the gender agenda due to persistent campaigns that focused on the protection of the girl child. They argued that even in addressing public gathering, society, and political leaders' emphasized education for the girl child only. In focus group discussions with the youth, the girls expressed concern about the predicament of the boy child. They argued that mothers are more concerned about the girl's whereabouts especially in the evenings than they are about the boys. Majority of the parents assume that boys can take care of themselves and they are not bothered about the activities they engage themselves in. The youth reported that some boys had been asked to drop out of school to let their sisters' further their education when parents found the fee burden too high. The study found that there is too much expectation on the boy child with regard to good behavior but little evidence was found that they are able to handle it. Some boys are given family responsibilities at an early age and are often urged on with words like "men are born to suffer". Generally, the respondents agreed that the boy child was being left behind. They felt that increased focus on the girl child was enhancing the perception that boys do not have problems.

Issues within the Family

Parents and family provide the best environment for children to grow. In a family where the father is often absent from home or is alcoholic, boys lack role models and parental guidance and this affects their development and even behavior. When the family unit breaks due to divorce, and the children are left with the mother, the boy child in some communities is expected to take on the responsibilities of 'head of family'. Such responsibilities often make the boy to drop out of school to engage in economic activities to support siblings (Bundi, 2018). If the divorced mother re-marries and carries the children to a new home, the boy faces additional challenge of being denied access to their biological father. In many instances, the boy is not accepted in the new family set up and is often left with grandparents. This causes stress and many result in the boys being rebellious and truant. According to Children's Officers in Kirinyaga and Meru Counties, where there is an option of adoption, most people preferred to adopt girls rather than boys. This denies the boy child an opportunity of being brought up in homes under the care of family and many often end up in charity homes.

Drug Abuse

All respondents identified drug abuse as a major issue of concern. Majority of drug abusers are boys and young men. The drugs often abused include

bhang, heroin, cocaine, illicit brews, Khat and miraa. Their peers as indicated by 80% of the respondents introduce boys to drugs and alcohol consumption at an early age. In Murang'a County, boys are introduced to and engage in drug and alcohol abuse during ceremonies circumcision, discos, mourning ceremonies, and this affected their school attendance and ultimately their retention and completion of school.

Peer Pressure

Peer influence among teenage boys was said to be very strong in Kenyan County. According to the respondents, many boys drop out of school because their friends have done so. Similarly, others engage in economic activities that keep them out of school because they see their friends doing so and making money. Their peers induct many boys into drugs and alcohol abuse, criminal activities and illicit sex.

Traditional Beliefs and Practices

The study found that some traditional cultural beliefs placed a lot of responsibility on the boy child even at an early age. The traditional society perceives the boy of 8-10 years to be 'a man' and therefore was expected to contribute to providing basic needs in the household. In Western Kenya, Luhyas' traditional norms and beliefs socialize boys into 'manhood' at an early age. They are expected to participate in decision making in family matters and in provision of basic household needs. A director in one of the institutions rehabilitating street children in Kakamega reported that in most cases it was easier for a woman to remarry with a girl child than with a boy child. The boy is taken to be a threat to inheritance of property but girls are viewed as less of a risk since they marry and leave the home (Amutabi & Lutta-Mukhebi, 2001). Many boys in such circumstances are left with grandparents and often drop out of school. In Kisii, once a boy has attained the age of fifteen years, they no longer sleep in the same house with the mother and sisters. In spite of them being of tender age, they are no longer under the mother's direct supervision. This hinders mentorship relationship and the boy misses on guidance by parents. Their living apart also exposes the boy child to freedom may translate to early involvement in sexual activity and abuse of drugs and alcohol. Among communities that circumcise boys to mark the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, after circumcision, boys were perceived as adult and therefore expected to take responsibilities of the adult men after circumcision. The circumcised boys are not supposed to mingle with the uncircumcised (Government of Kenya, 2009). This often makes the school environment unfavorable to them since majority of pupils in primary schools are not circumcised. The boys also do not wish to receive instructions from women teachers (often the majority) and often drop out of school. Cultural practices like "usiniriche" and "disco Matangas" often held at night

pre-dispose the boy child to experimentation with sex, drugs, and use of alcohol.

Early Marriages

In the coastal Kenya, boys are forced to marry when they impregnate a girl, regardless of their age. Again, if parents die, the older boy is expected to start a family and take care of siblings. In Kilifi County, some respondents said that once a boy was circumcised, they were considered adult and were expected to behave like adults and probably settle down to a family life.

Societal Changes in Norms and Values

In the traditional society, a child's proper upbringing was everyone's responsibility. A child belonged to society and was expected to listen and adhere to instructions given by adults. Any adult would correct and guide a straying child without being required to get parental consent. Today, society has shifted towards individualism. Many adults will watch a child go astray and do nothing about it (Onsarigo, 2018). Even Chiefs often cannot interfere, take action without the necessary cooperation with police if parents do not discipline their children or if they keep them out of school, or abuse them. The traditional role of religion was to shape a society to uphold good morals and values. This role has since been eroded leaving a society that lacks foundations for rising up responsible children. Church leaders in this assessment admitted that not all was well and that the church was no longer the bedrock of morality in society. Some respondents reported that some mosques were used to influence young boys to enroll in groupings that adopted radical beliefs (radicalization) and engagement in illegal activities (Government of Kenya, 2009).

Poverty

Due to poverty, families exert a lot of pressure to its members irrespective of age to provide food, water, clothing, and other essential needs. Unfortunately, informal businesses provide escape to this pressure by providing opportunities for boys to engage in illegal labour practices. Most 'boda bodas' in the country are operated by young boys who should be in school. These boys do not own the bicycles and motorcycles they ride. Adults lend out to the young boys to run transport business at a commission. The fact that boys love riding the motorcycles, earn money, and join the informal working class is a strong motivator for many boys to drop out of school. To this end, the boy is excluded from enjoying fundamental rights and privileges such as education, protection from family, but is instead exposed to child labour and exploitation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the perception that the boy child is losing his position in today's society is

valid. To cover it up, the boy child has resulted to vices like crime, drug abuse, terrorism, truancy among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If this trend continues, the result will be that development of the country will be impaired by having a large number of dependents, low skills development, and little entrepreneurship. Socially, there will be failed marriages, dysfunctional families, and high incidences of Gender Based Violence. The study recommends that;

- There should be regular reviews to find out whether it is the boy or girl who needs an intervention based on varying cultural, economic, and regional consideration.
- The programmes and intervention that support empowering of women and girls must engage men and boys as well.

REFERENCES

1. Amutabi, M., & Lutta-Mukhebi, M. (2001). Gender and mining in Kenya: The case of the Mukibira mines in the Vihiga district. *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women's Studies*, 1(2), 1-23.
2. Bundi, P. (2018). *Why girl child empowerment is killing the boy child*. Retrieved on August 20, 2018 From <http://www.sde.co.ke/thenairobi/article/2000166511/why-girl-child-empowerment-is-killing-the-boy-child?pageNo=2>.
3. Chege, F. N. & Sifuna, D. N. (2006). *Girls' and Women's Education in Kenya: Gender Perspectives and Trends*. Nairobi: UNESCO.
4. Government of Kenya (2009). *The National Youth Council Act, 2009*; Government Printer
5. Government of Kenya. (2001). *The Children's Act CAP 141*. Government Printer
6. Government of Kenya. (2009). *National Youth Council Act 2009*. Government Printer
7. Government of Kenya. (2010). *The Constitution of Kenya 2010*; Government Printer
8. Government of Kenya. (2011). *The National Gender and Equality Commission Act, 2011*; Government Printer
9. Government of Kenya. (2013). *Basic Education Act No. 14 of 2013*. Government Printer
10. Government of Kenya.(1998). *Community Service Orders Act No.10 of 1998*. Government Printer.
11. Hamasi, L (2018). *The Boy Child and New Gender Imperatives in Kenya: Investigating school dropout among boys in Marakwet County*. Retrieved on August 21, 2018. From: <https://kenyasocialscienceforum.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/rev-kenya-studies-reviewvolume-6-number-2-culture-language-and-disability.pdf>
12. Juma, J (2009). *Don't forget Educating the Boys*. ISS Nairobi Office
13. Kenya Government of Kenya. (2012). *The probation of Offenders Act*. Government Printer
14. Kiunacarol L. (2018). *Empower boy-child to strengthen future fathers*. Retrieved on August 23, 2018 From: <http://www.mediamaxnetwork.co.ke/people-daily/152028/empower-boy-child-to-strengthen-future-fathers/>.
15. Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2009). *Special Need Education Policy in Kenya*.
16. Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2014). *Free Secondary Education Policy in Kenya*.
17. Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2015). *Report on KCSE Examination candidature by Gender for Years 2014 and 2013*. The People Daily of 4th March 2015
18. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2003). *Free Primary Education Policy in Kenya*.
19. Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Services (2010). *The National Children Policy 2010*.
20. Muchemi, L. W. (2015). Media coverage of Domestic Violence in Kenya: A Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 3(5).
21. Nzioka, J. (2018). *Is the Boy Child Abandoned?* Retrieved on August, 23, 2018 From: <http://datascience.co.ke/blog/2016/06/06/is-the-boy-child-abandoned/>
22. Onsarigo M. C. (2018). An Evaluation of Determinants of Boy Child Participation and Retention in Public Secondary Schools: A case of Kisumu East, Kenya. Retrieved on August 15, 2018. From: [http://scienceandnature.org/IJEMS-Vol4\(3\)-July2013/IJEMS_V4\(3\)2013-11.pdf](http://scienceandnature.org/IJEMS-Vol4(3)-July2013/IJEMS_V4(3)2013-11.pdf).
23. Unicef. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
24. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2010). *Education Counts: Towards the Millennium Development Goals*, UNESCO; New York. 2010.
25. United Nations. (1995). *The Fourth World Conference on Status of Women September 1995*. Beijing, China.