

## SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN MUMIAS DISTRICT, KAKAMEGA COUNTY, KENYA

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### Abstract

The study aimed at investigating the major social factors which influence educational attainment and subsequent occupational mobility of Muslim women in Mumias district, Kakamega County. A sample of 120 Muslim women were drawn from two Divisions were interviewed over a period of two months. The study found that early marriage by the respondents influenced their educational attainment. It was also established that respondents who had attained secondary education and above were in gainful salaried employment as opposed to those who had no formal education or only primary education. However, most cultural related factors were of less significance. The study concluded that cultural related factors alone cannot inhibit Muslim women attaining high education but they were other intervening factors such as school-related factors and parents' socio-economic status. The study recommended that Muslim parents should be sensitized about the importance of western formal education of their daughters. This was based on the fact that most of the parents as found in this study were either illiterate or semi- illiterate and did not really value schooling for girls, instead preferred them to attain Quranic education. The study also recommended that the Kenyan government in conjunction with Muslim families ensure that children of both sexes have access to education and attend regularly without any excuses because both Quranic School and western formal education have their own time for learning and value.

**Keywords:** Social factors, educational attainment, Muslim women

### Introduction

Kenya like many other African countries had an indigenous education before the introduction of formal western education system. Indigenous education was generally communal in nature and responsibility for learning was dictated by the age grade and sex structure in the society (Sheffield, 1973; Njoroge & Bennaars, 1986; UNICEF, 1989; Sifuna, 1990).

Western formal education was introduced in Africa in the nineteenth century by Christian missionaries and it gained momentum during the colonial era as part of the establishment of the colonial society (Sifuna, 1990). Western education was introduced in Africa for purposes of serving the colonial states and advancing European civilizations. Besides, educational

planning had little or no relevance to African conditions and way of life. The function of education to the state was to provide junior civil servants and for Christian missionaries to strengthen church membership and enhance evangelization.

At independence most African governments inherited the educational system as designed and effected by colonial governments. They expanded the existing educational system to suit their countries demands instead of changing its characteristics and values (Sifuna, 1990).

Kenya through her KANU manifesto re-affirmed in the Sessional paper No. 10 of 1965 as part of its policy explicitly that it will rid the country of ignorance, disease and poverty. To accomplish this, universal free education was viewed as desirable,

and every effort was made towards the accomplishment of this goal. However, gender disparities have since resolved although women population still account for slightly over 50% of the country's population. These gender differences in access to education opportunities have however, been more pronounced among the Muslim communities. An investigation of Muslim women and their educational attainment then becomes the interest of this study. But who are these Muslim women? These questions seek for an elaboration on the historical background of the research population as given below.

Muslim women, together with the entire Muslim population constitute a significant religious minority in Kenya. Though no reliable statistics are available, it is generally believed that 15 to 30 percent of the total Kenyan population is Muslim (Republic of Kenya & UNICEF, 1991). Except for the North Eastern and Coastal provinces, where they predominate, Muslims in Kenya usually live in clusters in and around the major centers. There are historical reasons for this phenomenon.

In general, the Muslim community in Kenya consists of Muslim groups, large and small who live within the Kenyan national boundaries. The composition of Muslims in Kenya cuts across cultural, racial and geographical boundaries. The majority are to be found along the Coastal and North Eastern Counties of Kenya. Considerable populations are in areas like Mumias and Homa Bay in the Western part of Kenya.

The inhabitants of present day Mumias District are the Wanga. Wanga is a sub-ethnic group which forms almost 20% of the Abaluhya tribe. It is claimed that they migrated from North Africa, precisely Egypt to East Africa (Were, 1969). They passed by Lake Turkana to Western Kenya via Uganda. They passed through many "villages" such as present Kisumu town, Maseno and Tiriki, before the then Nabongo Wanga settled in Matungu and later built Lureko-present day Mumias.

All Abaluhya sub-ethnic groups arrived at their present day territories between A.D 1598 and A.D 1733 (Were, 1969). However, among them the Wanga were the most noticeable due to their civilization and ruling power in the Abaluhya land. Wanga like other Abaluhya sub-ethnic groups practiced African indigenous education before the inception of Islam and Christianity in the Kingdom (Were & Wilson, 1969). Among the styles of life introduction in the Wanga community was the Islamic education and then formal western education respectively (Wagner, 1970).

According to Were (1969) Islam was introduced in the Wanga Kingdom during Nabongo Shiundu's reign (1841-1884). The precise date is uncertain but Were (1969) confirms that it was about this time that Muslims arrived in the region and by 1878 Islam was well established. Nabongo Mumia the son of Nabongo Shiundu together with his cabinet and his three brothers embraced Islam after the death of their father (Wagner, 1988). The Muslims and Chief Mumia Nabongo developed a mutual relationship after the Muslims assisted the locals of Mumias to push cattle rustlers from Siaya district during a war. As relations with the chief improved in appreciation for their good work and their religious way of living, the Muslims were awarded wives from Wanga women. This was one way how the locals became Muslims.

When the in-laws visited the Muslims, they were attracted to the Islamic family life and the way the Muslims dressed. Besides when the local people were employed by the Muslims, "they were attracted by the Muslims 'perfect way of life (living as one family) and worship of only one God'" (Mumias Muslim Committee, 1994) hence many were converted to Islam. Other local people were also converted to Islam during Islamic festivals like idd and Maulidi. Presently statistics show that there are about 350,000 Muslims in Mumias District alone (Mumias Muslim Committee, 2010).

Muslims not only have a perfect way of life and worship of one God, but they also have their own type of education known as Islamic/Quranic education. This is expected of all Muslims hence it is compulsory for all of them to attain some level of it.

According to Sifuna (1990) the Quranic School has two levels – primary and secondary. At primary level, pupils expected to memorize one or two of the 60 parts of the Koran, often beginning with the shortest chapters (usually needed for daily prayers). Next the pupils are to learn the alphabet of the Arabic language, which is composed of 26 letters, all consonants (This takes between six and thirty–six weeks). The secondary level), school of learning has a much broader curriculum embracing a wide range of Islamic literacy, theological and legal subjects. The curriculum consists of the literature much of which is derived from Quranic teaching.

### **Statement of the problem**

Despite efforts by the Kenyan government to improve and expand education, women are still dis-

proportionately represented. Apart from women, several other groups in Kenya are similarly marginalized including communities in West Pokot (64%), Samburu (54%) and Wajir (14%) among others (Republic of Kenya & UNICEF, 1992). These are generally communities in the arid and semi-arid areas. These disparities are on gender and socio-economic grounds which lead to large imbalances in access to education followed by low achievements. Other notable underprivileged groups of people with regard to education are the slum dwellers and street children. In these communities and groups, women are the most disadvantaged in education and occupation. In the Muslim world, only 13% of adult women can read and write hence from the labour force in secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. Though the Muslim population and other groups such as pastoralists are disadvantaged in many spheres of life. Muslim women are particularly disadvantaged (Republic of Kenya & UNICEF, 1989). Republic of Kenya and UNICEF (1991) found out that very few Muslim women make it to secondary schools. Muslim girls generally compared to girls from other religious background are greatly disproportionately represented in schools, making up not more than 1% of Muslim girls among the Maasai in Narok (Chege, 1983) and among the Muslim Digo girls, in Kwale (Wamahiu, 1990). However, women outside Islamic community have been able to get access to education with ease and have conventionally been active participants (Republic of Kenya and UNICEF, 1991).

Muslims view western formal education as generally a man's domain and resist access of women's to education (Sifuna, 1990). Besides, Muslim women's lack of access to education could also partly be attributed to the differing views among Muslim authorities (Sifuna, 1990). For example, there are those openly opposed to teaching women beyond knowledge of the Koran. Other contentions are that women have low intelligence. But others dismiss these arguments, advocating for the advancement of women in education (Wamahiu, 1990).

These conflicting views may be said to have adversely affected the Muslim women's access to education. This has almost led to illiteracy, lack of general awareness and unemployment among Muslim women.

Evidently, participation of Muslim women in formal education remains very low and is characterized by high drop-out rates for girls and low educational attainment. Indeed very few Muslim women make it past secondary school and women rarely

complete even the first cycle of schooling (Republic of Kenya & UNICEF, 1991). The situation is not different for Muslim women in Mumias District.

### **Objective of the study**

The main aim of this study was to investigate the bottlenecks experienced by Muslim women in their pursuit for gaining entry and advancing in the modern schooling system and in employment in the formal sector.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- i) Analyze the social factors that affect the educational attainment of Muslim women in Mumias district

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Mumias District, Kakamega County, in Kenya. The study employed descriptive research design. The study adopted various sampling techniques. The choice of the study site was selected purposively. This was because the area has a historical evidence of an Islamic culture (Bakari & Yahya 1995; Were, 1990). Also, Muslims in Mumias district accounted for almost 52 % of the total population (Mumias Muslim Committee, 2010). A multistage sampling design was used to ensure representativeness at every stage. The multistage method was adopted with a hope to reduce bias and increase precision of the results. The unit of analysis in this study was Muslim women in the household who had received formal schooling in western education during the post-independence period. The study sample was 120 selected Muslim women. Twenty key informants who included school Head teachers, teachers, Muslim officials and village elders were also purposively selected from the selected villages. They were interviewed on identification depending on their age and the role they play in the society in relation to the study topic. Different methods of data collection were used to assemble both primary and secondary data in this study. Primary data were obtained from the respondents through an interview schedule and unstructured interviews were administered to the key informants. This study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the collected data. The SPSS was used in data processing and also in computing the descriptive and inferential statistics. Descrip-

tive statistics such as the mean, mode and range were used to summarize description of units with regard to enumerable or measurable characteristics. These summarizing measures were used to condense raw data into forms which supply useful information efficiently. The Chi-square was the inferential method used to infer the truth or falsify a hypothesis.

**Results and Discussions**

**Characteristics of respondents**

The sample of this study consisted of 120 re-

spondents who were Muslim women drawn from 4 divisions of Mumias District.

The youngest Muslim woman selected was 15 years old while the oldest was 47 years. Most of the respondents were aged 22 years (33%). More than a half (59%) of the respondents were married, while about one quarter (24%) were single. Very few respondents were divorced, separated or widowed.

Socialization agents in this study included respondents’ parents, teachers and peer groups. They constitute a very important variable when discussing factors that influence the educational attainment

**Table 1**

*Level of education attained by respondents*

Level of education	No. of respondents	Percentage
None (No certificate)	19	15.8
Primary	41	34.2
Secondary	43	38.5
Post-secondary	17	14.2
Total	120	100

Table 1 above shows that forty (36%) of the respondents had secondary education while 14% had post-secondary education. The variation in the educational levels in Table 1 suggests the possibility that there might also be various cultural factors that influence the Muslim women’s educational attainment.

The social factors analyzed in the study included parental and household factors, parents’ the different people that the Muslim women socialized with, parents’ household income, parents’ failure to pay the women’s school fees, and number of children in the women’s families.

It was hypothesized that parental and related factors influence educational attainment of Muslim women. The indicators for these factors included socialization agents, parents’ household income and the number of children in the household. These indicators were cross-tabulated with the Muslim women’s educational attainment and the findings are as discussed below.

**Table 2**

*The relationship between the respondents’ educational attainment and who they socialize with*

Education Agents	Low	High	Totals
Teacher	8(24.2%)	25(75.8%)	33
Peer group	33(66%)	17(34%)	50
Parents	19(51.4%)	18(48.6%)	37
Totals	60	60	120

X<sup>2</sup>=14.02 with 2df; p> 0.05

of Muslim women. The socialization process is continuous and it starts at the family level where we find parents and other siblings, run through school and the environment around an individual's home where we find peer groups and teachers and goes through one's adulthood. Hence when talking about individual education attainment in school, it cannot be strictly attributed to one of the agents because it seems like no one can influence a student's education, but an interplay of the three mentioned socialization agents. In table 2 above it is clear those teachers as socialization agents relative to other socializing agents (e.g peer groups and parents) do influence students' educational attainment highly. Perhaps this can be supported by the fact that, in the above Table, most respondents who chose teachers as their best socializing agent with regard to their educational attainment (9) had attained post-secondary education and none without education. The explanation for this may be that some teachers can be said to be first class advisors to students. Teachers are the ones who impart knowledge to the students and assess their abilities hence they can tell a weak student from a capable one. The teachers can also devote their time to the weak students to enable them to attain high education. About (61%) of the respondents reported that, this is done through extra homework to students and encouragement of student' discussion groups while in school. The groups enable students to learn from each other. On the other hand, some teachers tend to have stereotyped views about children from different classes. When students were asked to comment on how their teachers influenced their educational attainment, some (40%) reported that their teachers did not care much about whether or not they attended school, what they did while in school and how they performed.

It was clear that most respondents did not think the peer groups influenced their educational attainment. This view is shared by McIntyre (1970) when they assert that, although it is well established that social groups influence the behaviors of their members, there is little evidence of the effects which they have upon attainment and educational success. The reason for this seems to be the difficulty of distinguishing peer group from other influences. In Table 2 above, looking at the data critically, the peer groups may be said to have a negative influence on an individual's attainment. As a socialization agent, peer groups seemed to have influenced most of the low achievers (66%). When asked how peer group influenced their educational attainment, most respondents reported that they were bad company, thus their

peers were comprised of truants, lazy and carefree about their education and these characteristics ended up costing their education. Thus most of them had to drop out of school before completing the primary cycle or never continued with secondary schooling after primary level. This finding is in line with that of Coleman et al., (1966), in their national study in the United States, which found that student body characteristics were more closely related to attainment than were any school characteristics.

Among the major factors determining the membership of informal groups among children and adolescents are the nearness of their homes, whether they are in the same school class and, especially among older adolescents, the similarity of their interests and attitudes. Since peer groups tend to influence their members most in those matters about which there is greatest consensus among them, their effect upon academic achievement tends to be largely in reinforcing the influence of other significant aspects of the social environment.

Asked how they thought their parents influenced their educational attainment, (19%) of the respondents reported that their parents particularly those who had high education wanted them or to attain even higher educational levels than them. A majority of the respondents (81%) reported that although their parents were illiterate or semi-illiterate they inspired them to attain high education and make up for what they missed. According to (17%) of the respondents, such parents probably inspired their daughters by paying their fees in time, talking to them about the importance of education and providing them with necessary educational facilities. There are some respondents who reported that their parents were too strict to them with regard to their education and this made the respondents hate school and eventually dropped out. Some respondents also reported that their parents did not care about what they did in school. In general, the role model aspect comes in when discussing the socialization agent and how they affected the students' attainment. The agents who affected the students' attainment positively can be said to have been positive role models to the students while those who influenced the education negatively were negative role models.

A chi-square test showed that the statistical relationship between Muslim women's educational attainment and who their socialization agents were was highly significant at the set decision criteria of 95% confidence level in this study. This was based on the fact that the probability that socialization agents in-

fluence the educational attainment of Muslim women was greater than the critical value of 0.05. The calculated  $X^2$  (14.02) was greater than the Table  $X^2$  (5.991). The study therefore concluded that socialization agents influenced educational attainment of Muslim women.

The study also tested the factor of parents' households' income to find out how it affected the educational attainment of the respondent. This was done by cross-tabulating parents' households' income

and the respondents' educational attainment.

On the other hand, there are some (about 33.3%) respondents with high education whose parents were low income earners (Ksh < 1,999). This was explained by the fact that there are government bursaries for the needy children in schools. These respondents are mainly those who have been industrious from lower school level hence they are offered bursaries in their various schools until they complete their

**Table 3**

*Educational attainment of the respondent and parents' households' income*

Education Income	Low	High	Totals
<1,999	26(66.7%)	13(33.3%)	39
2,000-7,999	15(57.7%)	11(42.3%)	26
>8,000	19(34.5%)	36(65.5%)	55
Totals	60	60	120

$X^2 = 10.204$  with 2df  $p > 0.05$

Table 3 above seems to indicate that the higher the respondents' parents' households' income, the higher the chances of the daughter continuing with schooling. A majority of the respondents (65%) whose parents' household earned Ksh. 8,000 and above had attained high educational levels compared to 42.3% respondents whose parents' households' income were between 2,000-7,999 and 33.3% with parents' households' income of less than Ksh. 1,999. Only 34.5% of the respondents whose parents' households' income was Ksh. 8,000 had attained low education as compared to 57.7% and 46.7% of those whose parents' households' income was between Ksh. 2,000-7,999 and less than Ksh, 1,999 respectively.

The Chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' parents' households' income and their education at our set decision criteria of 95% confidence level. This was because the calculated  $X^2$  (10.204) was greater than the Table  $X^2$  (5.991). Therefore the probability that respondents' parents' income level influence the educational attainment was greater than the critical value of 0.05. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative rejected. It was therefore concluded that respondents' parents' household income does influence the women's

educational attainment. This finding concur with the general conclusion by many scholars (Bagha, 1978; Oppong1993; UNICEF, 1992) in the literature that, "children from poor families are observed to be inhibited in the educational attainment because they supplement the family's income, suffer from economic constraints and eventually from high drop-out numbers from schools.

There were some 34.5% respondents with low education whose parents' households had high income of Kshs. 8,000 and above. The explanation for this is that some children from such households have a carefree attitude towards their education because their parents have enough resources and simply drop out of school before completing primary cycle. Another reason was that some children are slow learners and keep repeating grades until they eventually dropout before completing primary school cycle. There were a few cases of deviant children in high income households. Such children as reported by one key informant squander their school fees and drop out of school. Another reason was parents' commitment with their money. A male key informant reported that, some parents have resources but the problem is their willingness to pay fees for their children. If they refuse to pay fees then a child may have to drop out of school.

highest levels of education. There were four cases of such students in this study. Also, some lucky children from low income households who have shown good academic performances in school have been granted funds by charitable organizations such as Mumias Sugar Company.

This was reported by a Headmaster of a secondary school in the study area. To elaborate on the issue of parents' households' income and how it affects the educational attainment of the respondents, further investigation was done on parents' failure to pay respondents' fees and how it affected the educational attainment as shown in Table 4 below.

It is evident from Table 5 above that there is a relationship between payment of school fees and a respondent's educational attainment. The proportion of respondents with high educational attainment whose parents paid school fees without failing is greater (57%) as compared to that of the respondents whose parents ever failed to pay their fees at one time or another. On this basis, it could be argued that most of the respondents whose parents failed to pay fees tended to drop out of school after primary level and this may explain why they represent a larger proportion at that level as compared to that of the respondents whose parents had never failed to pay fees.

This finding is in line with the general conclusion by

**Table 4**

*Whether or not parents had ever failed to pay a respondent's fees versus her educational attainment*

Education	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Post-Secondary	Totals
Failure to pay fees					
Yes	8(16.7%)	21(43.8%)	15(31.3%)	4(8.3%)	48
No	11(15.3%)	20(27.8%)	28(38.9%)	13(18.1%)	72
Totals	19	41	43	17	120

many scholars that children from poor families are observed to be inhibited in educational attainment. The statistical finding in Table 4 shows no relationship between the two variables. Therefore, despite the fact that the statistical finding between parents' household income and the educational attainment of Muslim women showed no relationship, there is ample evidence from the descriptive data above.

Finally, the number of children in a household was analyzed as a factor which influences the educational attainment of Muslim women. It has been suggested from literature that the higher the size of the family the lower the probability that a child gets especially in cases where parents have to decide which sex of the children should get high education than the other (Abagi & Masheti, 1994). Most (53%) households had less than 5 children. To test how the number of children in a household affected the educational attainment of Muslim women, the two variables were cross-tabulated as shown in Table 6 below.

(ii) That the solution of the low educational attainment among Muslim women lies within the social environment under which the women have been reared. Hence, where poverty is the main contributory factor to low educational attainment among Muslim women, improvement of the material conditions of the family is highly desirable. The assistance of private or public charity can usually be sought to release the stress of economic want.

ii) Also Islamic community based programs for aiding the needy Muslim girls while in school should be established instead of having girls drop out of school at times when they cannot be assisted by private or public charity. This would also mobilize the Muslim community for advocacy towards prevention of low educational attainment among their women.

**Table 5**

*Number of children in a household and respondent's educational attainment*

Education	Low	High	Totals
Number of children			
Less than 5	8(57.1%)	6(42.9%)	14
5-10	33(51.7%)	31(48.3%)	64
10 and above	19(45.2%)	23(54.8%)	42
Totals	60	60	120

$X^2=0.728$  with 2df;  $p<0.05$

The Chi-square test showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the number of children in a household and the respondent's educational attainment at the study's set criteria of 95% confidence level. This was based on the fact that the probability that the number of children in a household influence the respondent's educational attainment was less than the critical value of 0.05. The calculated  $X^2$  (0.728) was less than the Table  $X^2$  (5.991).

The impression derived from Table 6 is that the number of children in a household does not influence a respondent's educational attainment. This explains why there were more respondents (55%) with high educational attainment from households with more than ten children and fewer respondents with low educational attainment. On the contrary, there were more respondents (57%) with no education certificates from households of fewer than 5 children, The explanation for this is that the number of children in a household alone may not influence an individual's educational attainment, but there are other intervening factors such as the availability of resources despite the family size. For example, 8 respondents reported that they were from households which had less than 5 children but with low income which meant that the few children could not be sustained in school. Yet, almost a quarter of the respondents reported that they were from households with more than 10 children which had high income and were able to sustain their children is school without financial constraints. This study's finding contradicts that by Kariuki (1976) and

Sewell & Shah (1968) which found that students who come from small families have higher aspirations and end up attaining high educational levels than those from larger families.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

It was hypothesized that parents' of Muslim school girls' parental and household related factors would influence their educational attainment. The study found that most of the Muslim girls who had attained no education or only primary education hailed from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Their parents' households' belonged to either middle or low income brackets.

Looking at the number of children in the respondents' parents' households, most respondents (64 out of 120) irrespective of their educational attainment were from households which had between 5-10 children. Thus the number of children in a household was found not to be significant in influencing the educational attainment of Muslim girls.

The Chi-square test showed that there was no statiConcerning the parental and household related factors, the study concluded that out of the three variables studied including socialization agents, parents' households' income and number of children in a household, it is only socialization agents which was found to be significantly related to the educational attainment of women.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

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