

Influence of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Practices on the Retention of Girls in Secondary Schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to identify FGM practices that affect the retention of girls in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The study targeted 46 girls and mixed secondary schools located in Tiaty West Sub-County. The study used a simple random sampling method to select 14 secondary schools, stratified into 5 boarding, 5 mixed, and 4 day secondary schools. The sample size comprised 355 female students. They were issued with a questionnaire. The study conducted a pilot study in 2 secondary schools in Tiaty East Subcounty, Kenya. They included AIC Churo Girls High School and Tangulbei Mixed Secondary School. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability. The analysis of questionnaire data was conducted by excluding incomplete questionnaires, and the data were entered into SPSS version 27 for descriptive and correlational analyses (Pearson Correlation). The descriptive statistics analyzed included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The results indicated that FGM practices had a significant influence on girls' retention in secondary schools. The findings established that FGM remains prevalent in the community and is strongly influenced by parents, relatives, and community members, causing physical, psychological, and emotional effects that disrupt girls' school attendance, concentration, and retention. The study concluded that FGM remains a significant socio-cultural barrier to girls' retention in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County despite existing laws and policies. It is therefore recommended that government authorities strengthen enforcement of anti-FGM laws, while chiefs, elders and teachers establish early-warning and reporting mechanisms. Schools should provide counselling, and community and religious leaders should intensify sensitisation and promote alternative practices that protect girls' education.

Keywords: *FGM Practices, Retention of Girls in Secondary Schools, Baringo.*

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1. Introduction

Girl-child education is globally recognized as a foundation for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Through Sustainable Development Goal 4, the global community advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education that provides lifelong learning opportunities for both boys and girls (United Nations [UN], 2025). Educating girls contributes to healthier families, poverty reduction, social cohesion, and sustainable community development (Ayub et al., 2023; Gyasi et al., 2023; KIPPRA, 2024; Brathwaite et al., 2024; Lempassy et al., 2024; Nyirenda, 2023). However, despite these benefits, FGM practices continue to undermine girls' retention in secondary schools across different regions of the world.

Globally, FGM practices continue to hinder girls' retention in secondary schools. In Saudi Arabia, only 27.34% of girls complete upper secondary education (SESRIC, 2023), while Iraq records a 43% completion rate among girls due to socio-cultural practices such as early marriages and gender-based violence (UNFPA, 2023). Across Africa, girls continue to experience low retention in secondary schools because of harmful FGM practices. In Niger, girls have only a 17% chance of completing secondary education because 76% are married before age 18 and 26% before age 15 (Resilience, Empowerment, and Transformation [RET], 2022). Similarly, UNESCO (2024) reported that early marriages and excessive household chores contributed to a 45.7% completion rate in lower secondary education, while the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2024) noted that although girls constituted 49.8% of secondary school enrolment in Nigeria, many dropped out due to early marriages. In East Africa, only 41.7% of girls completed secondary school compared to 58.0% of boys in Uganda (UNEB, 2022), while in Tanzania only 38.24% of girls completed lower secondary education and 27% completed upper secondary education because of poverty and female genital mutilation (World Bank, 2024).

In Kenya, low retention of girls is prevalent in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs), with Garissa County recording only a 20% secondary school completion rate among girls due to female genital mutilation (Kenya News Agency [KNA], 2022). Similar trends are evident in Mandera County, where only 18.7% of girls progressed to secondary school because of teenage pregnancies and early marriages. In Baringo County, particularly Tiati West Sub-County, girls continue to experience female genital mutilation, resulting in declining retention in secondary schools despite interventions by political and religious leaders and other stakeholders (Koech, 2022; Kenya News Agency [KNA], 2019). These persistent FGM practices underscore the need to examine the influence of FGM practices on the retention of girls in secondary schools in Baringo County.

1.1 Problem Statement

The Kenyan secondary school education system is designed to ensure that all learners who complete primary education transition to and complete secondary education regardless of gender (Njeru, 2024). This requires parents, guardians, schools, and communities to provide an enabling environment that allows girls to remain in school until completion, free from socio-cultural barriers (Mutundu et al., 2024). However, despite government policies and initiatives aimed at promoting equitable access to education, the retention of girls in secondary schools remains a significant challenge in Baringo County.

According to the National Council for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NAKONEK, 2024), 16,030 girls had dropped out of school in Baringo County by 2024, with 6,269 (39%) of these cases occurring in Tiaty West Sub-County. Studies attribute this trend to persistent socio-cultural practices, particularly female genital mutilation (FGM), which continue to deny girls the opportunity to complete secondary education (Kangogo, 2019). Similarly, the Women Rights Institute for Peace (2024) reported that 373 girls underwent FGM during the previous December, of whom 189 (50.7%) were from Tiaty. Koech (2022) further documented increasing cases of forced marriages, evidenced by the growing number of girls rescued and accommodated at Cana Girls Rescue Centre in Nginyang. Consequently, literacy levels in Tiaty West deteriorated from 70% to 75% illiteracy between 2019 and 2022 (KNA, 2019; Kellio, 2022), reflecting the adverse effects of this socio-cultural practice on girls' educational attainment.

Despite the persistent cases of female genital mutilation reported in Baringo County, there is limited empirical evidence identifying the socio-cultural practices that affect the retention of girls in secondary schools within the county. This knowledge gap necessitated the current study to examine the influence of FGM practices on the retention of girls in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To examine the influence of FGM practices on the retention of girls in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no significant influence of FGM practices on the retention of girls in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Socio-cultural Theory (SCT) was developed by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky during the 1920s and 1930s. The theory posits that an individual's learning and development are shaped by interactions with the social and cultural environment. According to Vygotsky, knowledge is constructed through interaction with family members, peers, teachers, and the wider community, where cultural beliefs, values, and norms influence an individual's behaviour and development. In the current study, the theory guided the examination of socio-cultural practices affecting girls' retention in secondary schools in Baringo County.

Socio-cultural Theory explains that the social and cultural environment can either promote or hinder girls' participation and continuity in education. Through the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Vygotsky emphasized that learning is enhanced through guidance and support from parents, teachers, mentors, and other members of society. Where communities uphold positive cultural values that encourage girls' education, provide parental support, and promote mentorship, girls are more likely to remain in school until completion. Conversely, harmful socio-cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) discourage girls from remaining in school, thereby reducing their retention (Nyirenda, 2023). The theory therefore provides a basis for understanding how the socio-cultural environment influences girls' ability to remain enrolled and complete secondary education.

2.2 Empirical Review

Ayub et al. (2023) examined how female education in the Suleman Khel tribe found in Pakistan was affected by sociocultural factors. Using a subjective, qualitative research design, the study employed a purposive sampling technique to obtain 15 respondents. Primary data used in the study were collected through interviews. The findings indicated that certain sociocultural practices hindered the educational attainment of female students in Pakistan. In addition, it was noted that many girls failed to complete their secondary school education due to the value of marriage that the Suleman Khel tribe attached to it as compared to education, forcing many girls to drop out. Further, it was noted that the high rate of poverty in Pakistan forced girls to remain at home due to a lack of the required fees. Nevertheless, Ayub et al. (2023) collected data through interviews, failing to include primary data collection methods suitable for covering a large number of respondents.

Nadunga (2024) examined how secondary schools in Mbale District faced the challenge of high dropout rates among girls due to sociocultural factors. Using a descriptive survey design, the study targeted 170 community members. They were sampled using both purposive and simple random sampling methods to obtain 118 respondents. In addition, the study employed both questionnaires and interviews as tools to collect data. The data were analyzed, and the results showed that socio-cultural activities negatively influenced girl-child education. The study further noted that due to the ongoing cultural practices such as early marriages in the Mbale community, many girls were pressured to drop out of school. However, Nadunga (2024) did not consider the safety standards of female students who were commuting to school when addressing socio-cultural factors.

A case study was conducted by Lempassy et al. (2024) in the Ilchamus community to examine how girls' education was affected by African cultures. The study employed a descriptive research design, in which a total of 350 respondents were sampled using both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. In addition, data used in the study were collected by use of questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. After analysis, it was concluded that girl-child education was negatively affected by African cultural beliefs. Notably, the results also revealed that the practice of female genital mutilation among secondary schools' girls in Baringo County forced most of them to drop out of school before graduating. Lempassy et al. (2024) did not consider insecurities in Baringo County to be a social challenge faced by girls in school. Additionally, no social values were provided to support the girls' children's education in the region.

3. Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The study targeted 46 girls and mixed secondary schools located in Tiaty West sub-county. The study used a simple random sampling method to select 14 secondary schools, stratified into 5 boarding, 5 mixed, and 4 day secondary schools. The sample size comprised 355 female students. They were issued with a questionnaire. The study conducted a pilot study in 2 secondary schools in Tiaty East Subcounty, Kenya. They included AIC Churo Girls High School and Tangulbei Mixed Secondary School. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability. The analysis of questionnaire data was conducted by excluding incomplete questionnaires, and the data were entered into SPSS version 27 for descriptive and correlational analyses (Pearson Correlation). The descriptive statistics analyzed included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study sampled 355 female students and administered a questionnaire to them. Their response rate is as described in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Sampled	Response	Percentage
Female Students	355	291	82%

Table 1 indicates that 291 (82.0%) of 355 female students responded to the study. Of the 508 respondents, 426 participated in the study, yielding an overall response rate of 82%. This indicates a high level of involvement, making the data suitable for study. The girls, as sources of information, provided the study with direct accounts of the opportunities and challenges they encountered in their immediate environment, which influenced their decisions to remain in school.

4.2 Reliability Results

The study conducted a pilot study in 2 secondary schools in Tiati East Sub-County, Kenya. They included AIC Churo Girls High School and Tangelbei Mixed Secondary School. Reliability results are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha
FGM practices	0.872
Retention of Girls	0.868
Average	0.870

According to Table 2, Cronbach's alpha was 0.872 for FGM practices and 0.868 for retention of girls. The average Cronbach's alpha was 0.870. Because all coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, the research instruments showed a high level of internal consistency and were thus deemed reliable for the study. Cheung et al. (2024) revealed that the accuracy and credibility of information obtained from the data can only be assured through high reliability. The questions presented to the respondents were consistent in measuring the influence of sociocultural practices, existing interventions, and policy recommendations on girls' school retention.

4.3 Descriptive Results of Retention of Girls

Retention of girls in secondary schools was the dependent variable of the study, and the indicators measured were: number of dropouts, number of girls who complete school, number of girls in school, and number of girls who are readmitted. The tables used a 5-point Likert Scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA). Table 3 presents the descriptive results.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Retention of Girls

Statements N=291	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Girls have dropped out of school due to societal cultural practices	7 (2.4%)	6 (2.1%)	10 (3.4%)	85 (29.2%)	183 (62.9%)	4.48
Girls are encouraged to complete school for a better future	10 (3.5%)	22 (7.6%)	27 (9.3%)	115 (39.5%)	117 (40.2%)	4.05
School ensures that they monitor the number of girls in school	26 (8.9%)	10 (3.4%)	146 (50.2%)	83 (28.5%)	26 (8.9%)	3.25
School encourages dropout girls to be re-admitted	34 (11.7%)	17 (5.8%)	134 (46.0%)	81 (27.8%)	25 (8.6%)	3.16
Girls are encouraged to report missing classmates.	102 (35.1%)	88 (30.2%)	40 (13.7%)	39 (13.4%)	22 (7.6%)	2.28

As per Table 3, 183 (62.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 85 (29.2%) agreed, with a mean of 4.48 and a standard deviation of 0.856, that there were a large number of girls who had dropped out of school due to societal cultural practices. Further, 117 (40.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 115 (39.5%) agreed, with a mean of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 1.052, that girls were encouraged to complete school for a better future. Nevertheless, 102 (35.1%) strongly disagreed, and 88 (30.2%) disagreed, with a mean of 2.28 and a standard deviation of 1.277, that girls are always encouraged to report to the school's administration when they do not see their friends. The findings indicate that sociocultural practices were highly influential in forcing girls out of school in Tiaty West Sub-County.

Despite the existence of both local and formal measures to retain girls in school to secure their future prospects, their practicality was low. Weak peer monitoring and reporting mechanisms were noted, as many participants believed there was no formal structure encouraging girls to report cases of classmates who skipped or dropped out of school. This finding, therefore, presents the major problem at hand regarding the retention of girls. Whenever girls felt the school had little influence in following up with those who missed classes, skipped school, or dropped out, it became pointless to provide timely information when such occurrences were noticed among girls. Aisha et al. (2023) found that early marriages led to a high dropout rate of girls in schools. Increased pressure from communities, rooted in culture, forced girls not to attend school.

Ayub et al. (2023) established that cultural norms and beliefs were the major contributors to low female educational attainment, depriving them of learning opportunities. This is despite the existence of policy frameworks that support girls' education, but these are constrained by socio-cultural challenges. Gyasi et al. (2023) reported that cultural factors, community members' attitudes, and family expectations had a major impact on girls' retention in school,

despite the positive perception of education in modern society. UNESCO (2024) highlighted the need to strengthen support systems to detect early signs of girls missing school, as inconsistent support increases the risk of girls dropping out. It was suggested that a partnership between the school and community members be established to report to the authorities and intervene early to retain girls in school.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Female Genital Mutilation Practices

The study aimed to identify FGM practices that affect the retention of girls among secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County. Table 4 provides the results.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of FGM Practices-Female Students

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	S. D
N=291							
The community members practicing FGM on girls are always severely punished by the law	126 (43.3%)	70 (24.1%)	29 (10.0%)	35 (12.0%)	31 (10.7%)	2.23	1.388
Physical effects associated with FGM affect girls' attendance and participation in school.	16 (5.5%)	27 (9.3%)	41 (14.1%)	74 (25.4%)	133 (45.7%)	3.97	1.212
FGM contributes to girls being absent from school.	12 (4.1%)	31 (10.7%)	141 (48.5%)	62 (21.3%)	45 (15.5%)	3.33	0.998
Girls experience pressure from parents, family members, or community members to undergo FGM	3 (1.0%)	31 (10.7%)	41 (14.1%)	77 (26.5%)	139 (47.8%)	4.09	1.064
FGM is still practiced among girls in this community.	22 (7.6%)	12 (4.1%)	4 (1.4%)	104 (35.7%)	149 (51.2%)	4.19	1.158

4.5 Correlation Analysis

The study had hypotheses that stated that there is no significant influence of FGM practices on the retention of girls in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. Table 5 provides the results of the correlation analysis.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation

		Retention of Girls	FGM Practices
Retention of Girls	Social-Cultural Factors	1	.440
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	291	291
FGM practices	Pearson Correlation	.440	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	291	291

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 5, the correlation coefficient for FGM practices is $r = 0.440$ ($\alpha < 0.002$). The null hypothesis was rejected because the p-value was less than 0.05. The study established a significant influence of FGM practices on the retention of girls in secondary schools in Tiaty

West Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. Gyasi et al. (2023) and Jabeen et al. (2024) found that socio-cultural factors and household norms, respectively, improved girls' school retention.

4.6 Summary

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that FGM was still very common within the community, where the mean was high at 4.19 (SD = 1.158), and pressure from parents, relatives, and community members for girls to practice FGM had a mean of 4.09. Effects of FGM on girls' bodies that interfered with their school attendance were also established at a mean of 3.97, and FGM was identified as a factor of school absenteeism with a mean of 3.33. Teachers confirmed this linkage, especially that girls who were subjected to FGM experienced disruptions to their schooling, which had the highest mean of 4.70. It was also confirmed that teachers met FGM victims at a mean of 4.23. It is further evident from the interviews that complications associated with physical pain and other side effects of FGM could prevent girls from going to school normally, and the psychological and emotional aspects prevented concentration.

5. Conclusion

The study results show that FGM still remains a socio-cultural factor that hinders girls' retention in secondary schools in Tiaty West Sub-County. The continuous practice of FGM, together with the influence of parents, relatives, and community members, leads to physical, mental, and emotional problems for the girls. High ratings of teachers concerning disruptions in the schooling of girls who undergo FGM proved the impact of the practice on the educational process. Though there are laws and policies aimed at discouraging the performance of FGM, their effect is decreased due to the fact that there are expectations of society and the community. Thus, without preventing the performance of FGM and providing assistance for the girls being under the threat of the practice or undergoing it, the problem of absenteeism and dropouts will still persist.

6. Recommendations

Regarding FGM practices, the County Government of Baringo, National Government Administration Officers, and chiefs should ensure the effective implementation of laws and policies that protect against FGM. This entails prompt reporting, investigation, and intervention of cases of FGM to be carried out among girls. Chiefs, village elders, and teachers should devise early warning and reporting mechanisms to detect girls who are forced to go through FGM. The schools need to offer counseling services to girls who are victims of FGM to reduce the impact of physical, psychological, and emotional distress on school attendance and performance. Furthermore, the community leaders, religious leaders, and organizations against FGM need to enhance sensitization programmes that counter cultural expectations of FGM and encourage alternative practices that do not impede girls' education.

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