

Socio-cultural Factors Impacting Rural Adolescent Girls experience in Education in Kachechete Ward of Hwange District

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to assess the socio-cultural factors impacting rural adolescent girls experience in education in Kachechete Ward of Hwange District. There is lack of access to resources, gender socialization of girls' low self-esteem and peer influences. The objectives of the study were: to identify the socio-cultural challenges that affect the educational experiences of adolescent girls; to assess the impact of socio-cultural challenges affecting educational experiences of adolescent girls; and to ascertain strategies for addressing obstacles related to adolescent girls' educational experiences. The social norms and social justice theories were used to understand and explain the socio-cultural factors impacting adolescent girls experience in education. The descriptive survey design and a qualitative approach were used in the study. A total sample of 50 participants was selected using purposive sampling technique. Major findings were that house chores, lack of inspiration/motivation, lack of resources and lack of sanitary wear during menstruation affected educational experiences of adolescent girls. The impact of these challenges was absenteeism, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, early marriages and pregnancies, low participation because of beliefs about menstruation and academic disengagement in extreme instances. Mitigatory measures include parental active participation in girl child education, provision of sanitary wear, uniforms and food and holding seminars on various topics for children as well as parents. The government should intensify elevation of girls so as to lure them into the schools, through bursaries, girls' clubs, and provision of uniforms or other monetary incentives Traditional leaders should ensure that detrimental cultural and traditional norms are avoided and corrective measures are implemented. Schools should ensure that they have trained counsellors among their staff.

Introduction

Girl-child education is more than just about getting girls into schools but about ensuring that girls attend school with a sense of safety and support so that they graduate at all educational levels with the necessary skills for employment. Many obstacles stand in the way of Zimbabwean girls receiving an inclusive, high-quality education. There is an increasing number of children dropping out of school before completing their education, especially in secondary school. Girls are disproportionately impacted by this, especially those living in rural areas (SADC Gender Monitor, 2006). This study investigated the experiences and difficulties faced by rural teenage girls in accessing education especially in rural communities of Zimbabwe.

Background to the study

Since education is essential for both internal and international peace and stability as well as sustainable development, it has long been regarded as a fundamental human right. As such, it is a necessary tool for individuals to actively participate in their own nations' economies and society (Dy & Ninomiya, 2003). In keeping with this viewpoint, the United Nations declared it in 1948 as a basic human right in the Declaration on Human Rights, which includes the following article: *"Everyone has the right to education."* At the very least, free basic primary education is required. Global recognition of education's transformative potential as a vital component of societal progress has been achieved (Kombo, 2005). In the social, political, and economic spheres of human growth, education is crucial. It has improved the environment by making it a better place to live. In order to promote faster human development, education is required. Thus, education has evolved into a fundamental human necessity.

According to UNESCO (2013), severe gender inequalities continue to have an impact on the day-to-day lives of a significant portion of the population, particularly girls. There are nearly 34 million female teenagers who are out of school, and are passing up the opportunity to master fundamental abilities for work (UNESCO, 2013). The Millennium Development Goal number two aimed to achieve universal primary education by year 2015. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO2010), poverty is the primary factor that prevents girls of secondary school age from having equal access to education. Educating the girl child is one way of eradicating hunger and poverty. UNESCO, (2013) and Frank (1990).posit that schooling was central to ladies' improvement as it assists with fending hunger off, diminishes early relationships and births, enables ladies to beat segregation and have more prominent attention to their privileges. Women with education have more self-assurance and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, increase their chances of survival for themselves and their children, and improve their employment prospects (UNESCO, 2013; Frank, 1990).

Zimbabweans' attainment of independence in 1980, saw the massive extension of education services in the country. Resultantly, the number of students served by the education system nearly doubled from 885,801 to 1,310,315 in primary and secondary education. (Ndawi and Peresuh 2005), According to Nziramasanga (1999), this phenomenal expansion was intended to correct the colonial, social, and cultural imbalances that had prevented the black majority from receiving educational opportunities for many decades. Nevertheless, Zimbabwe in 1990s witnessed a turnaround of economic fortunes and the downward spiral began and economic deterioration led to the reintroduction of tuition fees. This means that education was no longer completely free in Zimbabwe. The introduction of programs such the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) (as directed by Secretary's Circular Minute Number 1 of 2003) was instituted to prevent orphans and other vulnerable children from dropping out of primary school due to the expenses. BEAM only served less than half of the target population. As of 2014, only 10 percent of pupils ages 15 to 24 have not completed primary education, with girls constituting a larger percentage (World Economic Forum 2015). Adversely, most rural population in Zimbabwe have been lamenting in abject poverty for more than some decades making it difficult for parents to keep their children in school in particular girls for they usually get the second preference in the context of the African tradition often referred to be as 'son preference' that view girls as bound to be married and become wards of their husbands thereafter. Related to this, was the issue of child marriage, which although was technically considered illegal, seems to reveal that the gaps in legislation could be compounding this cultural practice. The issues hampering girl child education especially in the countryside has remained understudied and therefore under appreciated. Ncube, L (2023), a reporter for the Chronicle newspaper in Bulawayo

reported that cases of teenage pregnancies were on the rise within Kachechete Ward area where a significant number of girls were dropping out of school. It was against this background that the researcher was driven to investigate the factors that impact on adolescent girls' experience in education in Kachechete Ward in Hwange District being the case study

Statement of the Problem

Considerable evidence shows that nationally in Zimbabwe, the education of the girl-child is notably affected by gender disparity with regard to access, retention, and completion of the schooling cycle (World Bank, 1995). Girl-child education is critical given that it prepares girls for tertiary education, career choices, and for overall effective community roles, survival and development. According to Marjorie Mpundu and Dhiraj Sharma (2023) in <https://blogs.worldbank.org> >nasikiliza > numbers-lost-0... most upper secondary level (age 17 – 18) girls of upper secondary school age are significantly more likely than boys to be out of school, and they lag boys in school completion. A casual observation of Kachechete Ward revealed that girl-child education faces several challenges such as lack of access to resources, multiple roles of women, family commitment, low self-esteem, lack of support, gender stereotypes, cultural beliefs, family socialization and peer influences have affected greatly the education of the girl-child in the area. It is therefore against this background that this study was carried out to find out challenges that are negatively impacting the rural adolescent girls' experience in education.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are firstly to identify the socio-cultural challenges that affect the educational experiences of adolescent girls in Kachechete Ward. Secondly, it is to assess the impact of socio-cultural challenges affecting educational experiences of adolescent girls in Kachechete Ward. Lastly, the study aims to suggest strategies that can be put forward to address the obstacles related to adolescent girls' educational experiences in Kachechete Ward. **Significance to the study**

The study findings are of great significance to various stakeholders involved in the campaign for the promotion of girl-child access to education. Stakeholders were appraised on the main problems faced by the girl-child in education hence they were in a position to face the challenge head on. The findings would be of benefit to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, education planners, teachers, parents and the whole of Zimbabwean society in general through its awareness of the effects of gender disparity mainly to the girl child. Adolescent girls stand to benefit from this study since they are the core of all the activities done during the course of the research.

Research method

Theoretical perspectives

The study is underpinned by both the social norms theory and social justice perspective so as to help achieve a more nuanced understanding of pathways to challenges that adolescent girls experience in education. Social norms theory is used to understand why social expectations exert a strong influence on how individuals behave. In this theory, social norms are defined as people's beliefs about what others do, and what others expect them to do (Mackie et al., 2015). Individuals comply with social norms for a variety of reasons such as group belonging, identity, or outcome expectations. On the other hand, the social justice perspective focuses on the distribution of resources and opportunities equitably among members of a given society. Social equity includes fair decision making in the socio-political structures that shape

opportunities around the social lives of people (Honoré, 1961). It is clear from this study that there is need for social attitude change towards the public valuing of, girls' education which has been associated with cultural values that function as a barrier to educational equity.

Research design

This study adopted the descriptive survey design which involves asking questions often in the form of a questionnaire to a large group of individuals either by mail, by telephone or in person. This design is most suitable for this research because it involves a large group of adolescent girls, teaching staff and parents. The qualitative approach was used to gather data for in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. The goal as alluded to by Yilmaz (2013) is to understand a social or human problem from multiple perspectives and it is conducted in a natural setting and involves the building of a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon. It uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context specific setting such as real world without manipulating the phenomena of interest (Patton, 2002).

Population

The target population is the population that the researcher uses to generalize the findings of the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This study therefore targeted all adolescent girls in secondary school, parents, the teachers and kraal heads in the ward. The population was estimated to be 500. Firstly, a stratified sampling technique was used to ensure that the four groups were represented. Lastly, purposive sampling technique which is a non-probability sampling method was used to select the sample. Purposive sampling was used to hand pick the 50 participants to the study

Table. 1 Sample size frame

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	EST. POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE
Adolescent girls	310	30
Parents	120	12
Community leaders	6	3
Teaching staff	65	5
Total	500	50

Research instruments

Instruments used to collect data for this study were interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher used two instruments as a triangulation technique. Triangulation involves the use of more than one instrument to collect data about the same phenomena (Mouton and Marais 1990). This study adopted the use of semi-structured interviews as a technique for data collection on parents, community leaders and Teaching staff. Focus group discussions were carried out on the adolescent girls. Validation of the research instruments was done through pilot testing them in an adjacent ward.

Data analysis techniques

The qualitative data which was collected using interviews and focus group discussions was analysed using content analysis. This involves coding the data, using ideas and themes so as to make sense and help explain issues as was given by the participants. There was also need to sort the data into categories and sub-categories so as to format the data into a story that can be understood.

Results and discussion

The socio-cultural challenges affecting educational experiences of adolescent girls.

The first common obstacle that adolescent girls face in relation to education are gender roles. The issue of gender stereotyping is heavily impacting the girl child. The girl child is confined to household chores at the expense of education. The opinion echoed by focus discussions is that:

We find it difficult to do our homework when we are also expected to do some chores before and after school as girls. As girls we are confined to the kitchen and expected to do all the household chores resulting in us getting disadvantaged in education.

Interview responses from teaching staff, parents and community leaders highlighted that adolescent girls in the community are affected by gender stereotypes.

Culture plays a significant role in the community. Most community members still believe that educating the girl child is a waste of time and resources. Forty of the participants are in agreement to this notion as highlighted below the girls in focus group discussions.

The community still values the boy child more than the girl child resulting in most girls either dropping out of school if there are some financial constraints in the families.

A lot of girls in this ward are out of school because of this problem. If there is illness in the home, it affects us girls as we are required to tend the sick person.

However, one parent had this to say:

Deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and practices may perpetuate the idea that girls' education is less valuable or even undesirable. Factors such as early marriage, traditions, and societal expectations may discourage families from investing in girls' schooling.

Cultural practices play a major role in the education process for girls in the ward. Most of the participants were of the notion that some jobs or chores are viewed and only accepted to be for boys and girls are not supported to pursue even if they have the capacity to do the task or job. Similar findings were concluded by Zinkeng and Fobellah (2020) who stated that major socio-cultural factors affecting girls' secondary education access, retention and completion rates include, child labour, house chores and caring done by the adolescent girl child is one of the highest main facets. The researcher also established that girls come to school already tired after fetching water, washing the dishes and then ride a bicycle to school in the hot weather. Girls tend to have higher levels of fatigue and physical exertion from engaging in strenuous tasks before and after school and this contributes to absenteeism or tardiness.

The study highlighted that the availability of resources such as sanitary pads and stationery is affecting most adolescent girls. This was pointed out by all the 30 girls who highlighted that resource availability was a challenge to most of them. Most girls at times fail to attend lessons when on monthly periods as they may not be having sanitary pads. All the school girls said:

Most of us have challenges during monthly periods as we have no money to buy sanitary pads. Some girls use cloths which is unhygienic resulting in us absents from school. At times we just go back home if menstruation occurs when at school.

The sentiment was also consolidated by parents and teachers when they highlighted the issue of poverty in families resulting in the failure to provide sanitary pads. This is also supported by UNICEF (2014) report which points out that many girls - particularly adolescents who are menstruating – do not go to school because of a lack of privacy, unavailability of sanitary disposal facilities and water shortages. In this study, it was found that some girls miss out on school because of insufficient access to sanitary

supplies UNICEF (2020) report also posit that in some places, schools do not meet the safety, hygiene or sanitation needs of girls

Peer influence seems to affect most girls' education negatively. The focus group participants highlighted that there are some girls who encourage other girls to get boyfriends for purposes of getting favours and money for buying snacks during school time. An interesting observation by a participant was that:

If you have a boyfriend, you won't be hungry at school as they can buy you some biscuits from time to time. However, there is a danger of being impregnated or losing focus on school.

Most educationist voiced the concern that most girls seem to be succumbing to peer pressure when they said:

Most of these girls are affected by negative peer pressure. Quite a number of them have dropped out of school due to this problem. Mostly we have out of school boys who loiter around the school premises towards knocking off time. The majority of the girls who are picked by these young men have since dropped out of school

Being a member of a peer group is one of the primary experiences of adolescence (Isuku, 2015). Generally, peer influence leads to engaging in risky behaviours such as substance use with some probability of negative consequences such as physical injury, social rejection, and financial loss. Indeed, peer pressure is regarded as one of the strongest determinants of juvenile delinquency. Moreover, peer pressure may lead to transactional sexual activities exposing young people to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Wubet, 2021). However, the girls were aware of the dangers of such practices which include being impregnated or losing focus on school.

In general, the study found that traditional gender roles and societal norms may dictate that girls' primary responsibilities revolve around domestic duties and caregiving. Some community members still believe that investing in girls' education is unnecessary or less important compared to boys' education. This is summarised from the teachers view as noted below:

Poverty and limited resources can hinder families' ability to send their daughters to school. In families where education is not seen as a priority, families may prioritize allocating resources to boys' education or other immediate needs, leaving girls with fewer educational opportunities. Peer pressure among adolescent girls is rife. I think girls should continually get mentored in safe environments about choosing friends wisely and about sexual reproductive health and right. The permissive environments in and around the schools where adolescent girls are exposed to which are not controlled by the school, expose the girl-child to lack of amenities and time to carry out extra studies in the evenings. Lack of role models in the community is a great challenge.

These findings agree with the findings of Chikuvadze and Matsvetu (2013) who in a related study in Kenya found out that lack of educated mothers and female role models impedes girl-child participation in education. In order for the girl-child to perform to their full potential they require appropriate role models of women in society, thus, promoting girl-child participation in schools.

Another parent voiced that:

Safety concerns, including harassment and violence, discourage us from allowing our daughters to travel to school, especially as they reach puberty. Lack of safe transportation and inadequate security measures at schools also contribute to these concerns.

UNICEF (2023) article points out that in rural contexts, schools are often far from home, and the safety risks in walking the long distance can be a significant barrier to accessing education. This is especially

true for girls when street harassment or violence is prevalent. Parents who fear for their daughters' safety may keep them from traveling outside their community.

Basically, these were the most common issues affecting adolescent girls in relation to education within the ward. The general opinion in the community is that girls must be educated. Interviews and focus group discussions highlighted that girls are being encouraged to learn but most people are in poverty and so sometimes it seems like a short cut for many to drop out and get married or go and work in Victoria Falls as maids. Most parents had this to say:

Educating a girl is a waste and more opportunities would rather be given to boys.

Girls are more vulnerable, for example, they get more tired easily from riding bikes from home to school and are also burdened with a lot of further chores which are tiresome. Girls are expected to be able to multi-task. Girls are also vulnerable to a lot of dangers on the way to and from school, for example, sexual abuse so they would rather not bother much about education since they will get married anywhere.

Interesting observations were also made by teaching staff who highlighted that:

More people are becoming more convinced that education is vital for girls as well as boys but the cultural or traditional beliefs still hold many back. The community has a mind-set to say the girls themselves ask for the sexual abuse and are usually not serious with school hence don't deserve the chance. When there is no money for sanitary, school fees etc. some families can expect it to be easy for girls to drop out and help at home and prepare for marriage

Students who participated in focus group discussions were in agreement that the current practices in their homes had positive outcomes in their lives. It was stated that most cultural values centred on encouraging respect in families between father, mother and children. However, research participants noted that some of the cultural practices posed negative challenges to girls because girls are not supported enough. Girls and women are seen more as home builders and mothers than people that can work and help in taking care of the family so the values have to change a bit but maintain the respect in families.

The impact of socio-cultural challenges affecting educational experiences of rural adolescent girls.

Exhaustion from multi tasks and the long distances cycled to and from school is one of the major challenges that these girls face. House hold chores are one the major issues affecting the girl child's education. The multi tasks that the girls are involved in results in poor performance leading to low self-esteem and confidence in school work. The three focus groups echoed the same sentiments when they said:

Coming to school already tired after fetching water, washing the dishes and then riding a bicycle to school in the hot weather means we are already tired before we even start lessons. After school we do not get the chance to do homework or read because we will be tired and have more chores plus there is no electricity to read at night.

Basically, all the participants were in agreement that girls tend to have higher levels of fatigue and physical exertion from engaging in strenuous tasks before and after school. This sometimes contributes to absenteeism or tardiness due to the time required for completing chores. The teachers also supported this sentiment when they said:

Most girls doze in class due to fatigue and the long distances they ride to school. In most instances the majority of these girls would not have done their homework. Performance from most girls is very poor and their work out put and standard is very low.

It was also agreed by the participants that some cultural practices where fathers are supposed to be feared and distant from the rest of the family tend to encourage violent behaviour among boys as they are expected to be aggressive while girls are expected to be soft and calm. On the issue of early marriages, all focus group discussion participants were of the view that it was a complete distraction to education which is sometimes caused by various issues like poverty. Sometimes early marriages are a way to survive especially in the case of orphans or children in child headed families. Sometimes a family expects to gain some form of economic resources by marrying their daughter. The study found that this happens a lot and mostly caused by hunger, peer pressure or lack of sexual reproductive health education.

Family support to girls plays a major role in their education. Lack of family support affects the girl child badly. The study found that girls need support in education through availing of required resources such as stationery, sanitary wear, school fees, food and emotional support through teenage hood. The desire to get these basic necessities results in the girl child engaging in premarital sexual activities which may result in teen pregnancies. During the focus group discussions, it was also highlighted by several participants that rural areas often lack proper educational infrastructure such as classroom space and other basic amenities like electricity and clean water. This also contributes to the difficulties encountered by girls when attending school.

On the issue regarding the effects of stereotypes, the study found out that these exists both at school and at home. Research participants made the observation that at school and at home there are a lot of stereotypes which lead to girls not receiving enough inspiration towards their dreams, being misunderstood, being shunned by community because of choices that are considered unacceptable. All participants agreed that this tends to result in girls not producing the expected or possible or aimed results and not going further in life. The stereotypes also affect study time and homework as the adolescent girls fails to get some time to do their school work while at home. It emerged from the study that girls do not have adequate time to work on their academic tasks at home. One respondent stated that:

At home I have limited time for study because I usually get home when it's getting dark and I have to cook and wash uniforms. The others said: At my home we use candles and it is limited hence I can only try to quickly write some homework but I will also be tired from long distance walking or riding a bicycle.

It was also noted through the focus group discussions that there is no electricity in most homes and most families cannot afford solarizing their homes. As a result, another respondent said;

In short, it is clear that social background has heavy influence on the performance of girls in school. Similar observations were made by Zinkeng and Fobellah (2020) on their comments that in a society where men are more likely to be leaders and where women have been stereotyped into playing a subordinate and supportive role, it is not entirely surprising that women and girls are less likely to plan a career but playing a subordinate and supportive role to men.

Perpetuation of poverty is one of the major problems highlighted by the participants. One participant had this to say;

How do you expect to break the vicious cycle of poverty without being educated. Most of the girls who have dropped out of school due to financial challenges are leading some miserable lives. Without a proper education one remains doing these poorly paying jobs like being maids in Vitoria Falls. Some girls have been impregnated as they remain idle at home.

The teachers and parents also weighed in when they said:

Most of the girls who dropped from school are maids in Victoria Falls. The majority are vendors as they could not proceed with education. Its so disheartening to witness these girls as some of them are loitering

around in the community. Some of them become teen mothers with no one to support them. Given this scenario, poverty haunts them resulting into prostitution.

This sentiment is also supported by

Strategies to address obstacles related to adolescent girls' educational experiences in the ward

The study sought to find out ways that families should use to support adolescent girls in their education and several responses were provided by the research participants. From the focus group discussions, the study proposed that parents should work with the school and support girls through enough stationery, provide sanitary wear and uniforms and even food for break times at school. One participant had this to say;

Parents or guardians should also provide lights even solar for reading and limit chores that are expected to be done by girls who would have also spent the day walking/riding long distances Parents should be involved because they should know the importance of the girl-child education so that they will be able to reduce domestic chores to create study time for the girl-child, motivate girls to go to school, pay fees, offer guidance and counselling, provide some of the learning resources, treat all children equally, provide adequate meals at home, participate in school activities, enforce discipline, follow-up on drop out cases and be role-models as a step towards promoting girl-child education.

The study found that parents should work with the school and support girls through the provision of enough stationery, provide sanitary wear and uniforms and even food at school break times. It was also found that families should provide emotional support to girls as they experience a lot of different challenges. This finding reinforces assertion that the family unit, functioning on the basis of love and respect, is preeminent in all areas of comprehension, tenderness, selflessness, and caregiving (Soelton, *et al.*, 2019). Parents are responsible for their children's health, nutrition, education, and socialization until they are mature enough to handle life on their own. While parents are generally knowledgeable about efforts made to better their children's lives, they could benefit from more educational details regarding their children's guaranteed access to quality education (Papadakis & Kalogiannakis, 2017). This is why educators, psychologists, and other researchers place such an intense emphasis on the importance of parents in shaping their children's identities within the context of the family and beyond.

Secondly, all participants highlighted that there are several Non-Governmental Organizations and Government programmes that girls have benefited from. Some organizations have provided sanitary wear, stationery, uniforms, food, bicycles and even counselling sessions for emotional support. The study found that Non-Governmental Organizations that come from time to time offering help include Zion City Foundation, Higher Life Foundation, Capernaum Trust, ZB Bank and many others including government programs like BEAM. Murphy and Carr, (2017) posit that civil society should take a leading role in closing the ranks and gaps created by the girls' social background, which have a heavy influence on the performance of their schooling

Thirdly, the study established that all schools do not have trained counsellors but there are some community members who have been trained in that area and these work with school authorities when necessary. The main roles performed by these counsellors include psychosocial support to girls experiencing various challenges including relationship issues (with parents, teachers and other relationships), peer pressure, dealing with loss of a loved one, experiencing challenges in education such as career choice and subjects to choose and more. Mnguni (2014) stresses that when teachers are not trained to be sensitive to the plight of the children they are meant to protect, they can be abusive, knowingly

or unknowingly. In this study, the role of the teaching staff in girl-child education was said to be that of offering support beyond just the academic teaching. Mnguni (2014) argues that the role of the teacher as a counsellor should be to guide and counsel the girls so as to dissuade the girls against early marriages, premarital sex, enlighten the girls about their rights and encourage them to complete schooling.

These findings also support the social justice theory as the participants highlighted the need for knowledge on various topics for children as well as parents in the community. In this case, the idea of social justice embraces the sharing of knowledge and opportunities equitably among members of the society. Social equity includes fair decision making in the socio-political structures that shape opportunities around the social lives of people (Honoré, 1961). It is clear from this study that there is need for social attitude change towards girls' education and this change has been perceived by participants as a crucial measure for any meaningful transformation in favour of girls' educational experience and social participation.

The teachers have to play a great role in the girl child education. The role of the teaching staff in girl-child education was to offer support beyond just the academic teaching. Teachers spend so much time with them and they help through giving advice and sometimes having interventions and also bringing in the parents so that they work together to provide them with a conducive learning and growing environment. One teacher even highlighted that:

We constantly remind them about the importance of education and if there is a child who lacks something and has a potential to pass, we chip in and help. Our schools need to be responsive in the way they treat the girl child.

The UNICEF (2020) report emphasized that teachers need to be gender sensitive. It posits that gender-responsive pedagogy equips teachers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to empower them to respond adequately to the learning needs of girls and boys through using gender-aware classroom processes and practices. It develops teaching practices that foster equal treatment and participation of girls and boys in the classroom and the wider school community.

Lastly, the community and the leadership must play a major mitigating role in order to reduce the impact of socio-cultural factors that cause girls to drop out of school. All participants reiterated that the community leaders and members should work together, that is parents should play their part, the school its part and other stakeholders such as clinics and other NGOs should all come together and cover every gap. The community leaders stated that:

Seminars on various topics should be held for children and the topics should cover HIV/AIDS, sexual reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, skills development clubs and more to help both students and parents to understand these topics and know how to support their children. The NGOs and the school community must work together to change our own environment on behavioral factors like life skills, self-sufficiency and awareness of gender values needed to change our views towards girls' education in our community.

The parents also said:

Collaboration between the school community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has the potential to transform our local community's attitudes towards girls' education by promoting self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, life skills, and gender values awareness. The laws of the country should be followed especially when a girl falls pregnant or gets into an early marriage, the due processes should be followed to address those issues and community leaders should take their place and not allow people to abuse children for some gain.

However, another parent was furious that girl children are made pregnant as young as form 2 and the community sometimes turns a deaf ear towards such a matter.

Findings above reveal several strategies expressed by participants. In short, these include that families should provide emotional support to their children, continued support from Non-Governmental Organizations and Government programs, having trained counsellor in schools and having educational seminars on various topics such as HIV/AIDS, sexual reproductive health, menstrual hygiene and skills development clubs.

of poverty and cultural norms and practices that are reinforced through gender-based socialization and discrimination.

This study also discovered that adolescent girls were vulnerable to dangers on their way to and from school, for example, sexual abuse. Girls also get tired easily from riding bikes from home to school and are also burdened with a lot of house chores.

The study found that traditional gender roles and societal norms dictate that girls' primary responsibilities should revolve around domestic duties and caregiving. The children are also discriminated against based on their gender as boys are preferred to girls in terms of educational priorities. Some community members believe that investing in girls' education is unnecessary or less important compared to boys' education. It can be noted that despite many efforts by the Zimbabwean governments to try and deal with these problems faced by the girl child, Zimbabwean norms prioritize the male child over the girl child at home, pushes the girl child towards school dropouts and into early child marriages among many other problems (UN, 2016; Chingono, 2019). Another strategy as highlighted by UNICEF (2020) report is to ensure that gender-equitable education systems is instituted as it may contribute to reductions in school-related gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Conclusion

With regards to the socio-cultural challenges affecting educational experiences of rural adolescent girls, the study concludes that the problems of the girl child are largely a consequence of poverty and cultural norms and practices that are reinforced through gender-based socialization and discrimination. All these have dire consequences on the social or future status of the girl child. The major challenges affecting educational experiences of adolescent girls are; poverty situations, house chores, lack of inspiration/motivation, lack of resources such as books, textbooks and other stationary as well as lack of sanitary wear during menstruation. As a result of poverty, some families prioritize allocating resources for boys' education, leading to girls being left behind or forced into early marriage or domestic chores. Other general social issues affecting adolescent girls' educational experiences are peer pressure, lack of role models and vulnerability to dangers such as sexual harassment on their way to and from school. The study also concludes that educational challenges faced by adolescent girls can be explained partly through the application of the social theory which explains that individuals comply with social norms for a variety of reasons: group belonging, identity, or outcome expectations.

After identifying the socio-cultural challenges affecting educational experiences of adolescent girls, the study sought to understand the impact of the mentioned challenges on education of adolescent girls. The study concludes that the constant balancing act between chores and academics, leads to decreased motivation, self-esteem issues, and overall academic disengagement. These have a negative psychological and educational experiences of adolescent girls. Peer pressure also influences adolescent girls to engaging in risky behaviours such as substance use and sexual indulgence. The study concludes that this results in

early pregnancies and marriages for adolescent girls. As such, early marriages become a way to survive especially in the case of orphans or children in child headed families. However, most girls who find themselves in such situations do not return after giving birth due to stigma, lack of school fees, lack of childcare and the unavailability of flexible school programmes.

The study also concludes that the family is a powerful player in gender issues. Adolescent girls need family support in education through availing of required resources such as stationery, sanitary wear, school fees, food and emotional support through teenage hood. Stereotypes also exist both at school and at home and these have resulted in girls not receiving enough inspiration towards their dreams, being misunderstood, being shunned by community because of choices that are considered unacceptable. Lack of emotional support, low self-esteem and lack of confidence are some of the causes of low performance by adolescent girls. Poor academic performance by adolescent girls results mainly from poor management of reproductive health issues particularly menstruation as some girls loose on school time due to absenteeism during menstruation.

With regards to strategies that can be used to address obstacles related to adolescent girls' educational experiences, the study concludes that partnership between parents, school authorities, government and non-governmental organizations should be established and maintained. These partnerships should help adolescent girls with resources such as emotional support, stationery, sanitary wear, uniforms, security and even food. The study also concludes that trained counsellors in schools are an important human capital asset. Seminars and skills development clubs are also important ways that can be used to disseminate information and knowledge on various issues affecting adolescent girls and these include HIV/AIDS, sexual reproductive health, menstrual hygiene. The study also concludes that the role and involvement of the non-governmental organizations has largely created temporary relief, but it has not been sufficient to overcome the structural nature of the circumstances that create the problems of the girl child, and indeed, the empowerment of the girl child has not been materialized.

In order to implement strategies to address obstacles related to adolescent girls' educational experiences, the study concludes that the social justice theory should be considered as it embraces the sharing of knowledge and opportunities equitably among members of the society. This study concludes that there is need to re-socialise families and communities into a new order where gender equality is the norm. This change is a crucial measure for any meaningful transformation in favour of positive girls' educational experiences and social participation. The study has attempted to substantiate the argument that the problems of the adolescent girl in Zimbabwe are a result of the structural nature of social relations. Various studies on the challenges faced by adolescent girls reveal that there have been improvements in Zimbabwe such as increased enrolment rates in education, especially in education at the primary level and early stages of the secondary level. However, the status of the adolescent girl has not seen a dramatic transformation, especially in poor and rural areas, and remains fragile in the face of economic and social developments.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. The government should intensify elevation of girls so as to lure them into the schools for example, through bursaries, girls' clubs, and provision of uniforms or other monetary incentives by different audiences like, NGOs, Parents, and Schools. Ministries of Education should have more educational workshops for girls to boost their confidence and self-esteem. The Zimbabwean government should enforce its education for all (EFA) policy in order to ensure that the girl child, particularly the vulnerable and rural girl, is not excluded from

school. Schools should ensure that they have trained counsellors among their staff so as to support adolescent girls who are struggling emotionally and having challenges in learning. Teachers need to play an important role in closing the ranks and gaps created by the gender role stereotyping experienced by pupils in the home and those incorporated in textbooks and reinforced by the hidden curriculum of the school. Understanding both the overt and covert ways in which gender ideologies operate and are manifest in the school curriculum is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for alleviating the effects of gender inequality and promoting learning equity. The curriculum needs to be gender sensitive or balanced as opposed to being gender blind to the plight of girls and women if it is to empower girls to be on an equal footing with boys and to compete for equal opportunities in life. School counsellors empower students to navigate challenges, build resilience, and develop the necessary skills to thrive in both their personal and professional lives. By equipping adolescent girls with effective coping mechanisms and study skills, counsellors enable them to overcome obstacles, enhance motivation, and achieve academic excellence. Adolescent girls require a good environment, which is conducive to learning. Parents should support the girls by providing good lighting systems, enough reading space, and minimal interference from family members or friends when doing their homework. Families should try hard to provide basic items such as food, sanitary pads, textbooks, exercise books, pens, pencils and school fees. The traditional leaders have a responsibility to ensure that detrimental cultural and traditional norms are avoided and that corrective measures are implemented to prevent girls and women from becoming victims of inequality and disempowerment stemming from ingrained beliefs that people have been socialized to accept. The community should unite and work closely with local leaders to channel grievances to civil society and government structures in a timely manner. The community members should be bold enough to challenge some of the traditionally accepted customs so they can modernise in line with upholding women and girls' rights. Girls should emancipate themselves by pursuing high status professional careers since given favourable educational and training conditions, they can achieve as equally good as their male counterparts.

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