

The impact of gender on orphans' self-esteem and academic performance among secondary school students in Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties of Kenya

¹Dr Margaret Wanjiru and ²Dr Julius Gathogo*

¹School of Education and Social Sciences, Karatina University, Kenya ²School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kenyatta University

Abstract

Gender as constructed by culture in our African context, has the potential of influencing the level of self-esteem of a child, and particularly a girl-child or a school girl for that matter. In turn, this will (negatively) affect the way she performs in school work. In view of this, the study sets out to assess the relationship between the gender of orphans and self-esteem among secondary school students in Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties, Kenya, as a build-up to the above hypothesis. In this research, the total number of students was 58,492. Out of this 426 were sampled. This study was theoretically guided by Rogers' self theory. In turn, Rogers (1902-1987), in his contribution to psychology, contended that every person can achieve his or her goals, wishes and desires in life if *self actualization* took place. The study adopted a survey, which utilized casual comparative research design. The data was collected using questionnaire. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The major finding in this study was that Self-esteem was found to be influenced by gender of orphans and the self-esteem in turn influenced the aspiration of education level as well as jobs. The study recommends that the socialization by the society should not be gender discriminative that is all children should be treated the same way.

Keywords: Education, Gender, Kenya, Orphaned, Self-esteem.

INTRODUCTION

Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties of the former Central province of Kenya are situated in the southern slopes of Mt. Kenya, the highest mountain in Kenya, and the second largest in Africa. The upper parts of the two counties receive abundant rainfall (over 63 inches per annum) and have fertile volcanic soil. Further, tea and coffee are grown as cash crops. In the lower 'star grass' (referring to agro-ecological) zone (middle zone), maize and beans grow well and dairy cattle are kept. In the "lower down" area, the Mwea plains of Kirinyaga County, which were once dry wastelands, booming horticultural activities are currently the order of the day. The change from mere dry wastelands came about as a result of an irrigation scheme that tapped water from the rivers Nyamindi, Thiba and Ruringazi. Generally, the two Counties are endowed with human and material resources, plus a good habitable climate. Despite the

above positive attributes with regard to Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties, gender imbalances remain a thorny issue just as in the rest of Africa. As Isabel Apawo Phiri, a renowned scholar in gender studies, avers:

The construction of womanhood by patriarchy is one of the central issues for feminist theologians globally and particularly in Africa because it has influenced the way women and the roles that women can play in African Church and society are imaged. Patriarchy has defined women [and girl-children] as inferior to men [also refer to boy-children] thereby perpetuating the oppression of [girl-children] women by religion and culture (Phiri 1997:11).

Likewise, Musimbi Kanyoro observes the conditions of the girl-child as in need of redemption from cultural

practices when she avers that:

Harmful traditional practices are passed on as “cultural values” and therefore are not to be discussed, challenged or changed. In the guise of culture, harmful practices and traditions are perpetuated. Practices such as female genital mutilation, early betrothals and marriages, and stigmatization of single women and widows, [polygamy, domestic violence] hinder the liberation of women (Kanyoro 2001: 159).

Gender constructions

In view of the above, it is critical to define gender as the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. It has been noted that gender may play an important role in the development of self-esteem (Block and Robins (1993), Kling (1999) in Heinonen and Mattmiller, 2003). Datta, (1984) observed that the stereotyped expectations in relation to sex roles may tend to be reflected in the attitudes of parents and society toward the child.

In addition, Josephs, Markus & Tafarodi (1992) in Heinonen and Mattmiller (2003) noted that women's self-esteem is more dependent on significant others, whereas men's self-esteem depends more on independent achievements. As such, of note worthy is that social cultural expectations are gender dependent and there are gender differences in their associations between temperament and family factors. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the development of self-esteem may differ according to the gender of the child (Block, 1983 in Heinonen, et al 2003).

In Branden's view (1987), self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It can be understood as a consequence of the subjective judgment that every person makes of his ability to face life's challenges, to understand and solve problems, and his right to achieve happiness, and be given respect. Moreover, self-esteem has also been thought as an important outcome due to its close relation with psychological well-being of children (Branden, 1987).

In psychology, the term self-esteem is used to describe a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. Self-esteem is often seen as a personality trait which means that it tends to be stable and enduring. Self-esteem can involve a variety of beliefs about the self, such as the appraisal of one's own appearance, beliefs, emotions and behaviors. Therefore, Self-esteem is an essential human need that is vital for survival and normal, healthy development. Self-esteem arises automatically from within based upon a person's beliefs and consciousness. Self-esteem occurs in conjunction with a person's thoughts, behaviors, feelings and actions.

High self-esteem and the self-serving attributions that maintain it contribute to emotional well-being and protect us against depression and anxiety (Greenberg et al 1992, Haaga, Dyck & Ernst, 1991 in Luther & Blatt, 1993). In most circumstances, people with high self-esteem set appropriate goals and are effective at meeting their goals (Benneister, Heatherton & Tice, 1993 in Cloninger 1996). Crocker (1993 in Myers 2001) reports that subjects with high self-esteem are likely to defend their self-esteem.

Moreover, Shaffer (1989) observes that children with high self-esteem generally feel quite positive about their perceived characteristics. In effect, people who feel good about themselves have fewer sleepless nights, succumb less easily to pressures to conform, are less likely to use drugs, are more persistent at difficult tasks, are less shy and lonely and are just plain happier (Crocker & Wolfe, 1999, Leavy, 1999, Fafarodi & Vu 1997, in Myers 2001). Also in agreement is Harter (1990) in Papalia (1995) who contends that children who like themselves tend to be cheerful, confident, curious and independent, trusts his/her own ideas, approaches challenges and initiates new activities with confidence, describes herself/himself positively and is proud of her/his work, adjusts fairly easily to change, tolerates frustration, perseveres in pursuing a goal and can handle criticism and this enhances academic performance.

Sedikides (1992) in Cloninger (1996) says that the mood and self-evaluation influence each other. When people evaluate themselves negatively, they experience unpleasant emotions such as shame, embarrassment and feelings of inferiority. In addition, Brown & Mankowski (1993) in Cloninger (1996) pointed out that when people with low esteem are in a negative mood, they are more likely to criticize themselves which may put them at increased risk for depression.

In addition Coopersmith, (1968) in Malim and Birch (1998) contends that low levels of self-esteem may indicate feelings of worthlessness possibly resulting in depression and anxiety. In agreement is also Herter (1990) in Papalia (1995) who observed that the children with low self-esteem do not trust their own ideas, lack confidence, hangs back and watches instead of exploring on their own, withdraws and sits apart from other children, and describe themselves negatively, without pride in work, give up easily when frustrated and reacts immaturely to stress and inappropriately to accidents. Herter continues to point out that children with low self-esteem are more likely to be depressed and a depressed mood can lower a person's energy level which in turn can affect competence. Thus, the low self-esteem level would not enhance high academic performance.

Self-esteem of orphans is central to everything (Kiyapi 2007). Kiyapi continues to observe that self-esteem is the difference between success and failure, affects thinking, causes one's outlook to be positive or negative, affects confidence, self image, enables one to have the right attitude to succeed at work and affects happiness. He

also says that the potential to achieve what one most desires is directly related to his/her self-esteem, and failure is also more likely when one suffers from low self-esteem since one believes others when they tell him/her why he/her cannot succeed. With this in mind, it was important to assess the relationship between gender and self-esteem level of the total orphans.

Objective of the Study

From the outset, the study sought to explore the impact of gender of total orphans on their self-esteem level. In view of this, the study will shed more light on the plight of orphans with respect to gender relations.

Theoretical Framework

The study is theoretically guided by Rogers' (1902-1987) humanistic psychology which contends that for a person to "grow", he or she needs an environment that provides him or her with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood). Hence Roger's (1961, 1964, 1969, 1973, 1983) theory of "self" which focuses on the relationship between the self and other aspects of life is critical in this study. For him thus, your self is the centre of experience. A human being is to some extent the architect of one's self who shapes himself/herself through freedom of choice and action. This choice is made on the basis of his/her values and ones values are also part of one self. According to Rogers, the sense of self is innate and unique. The self provides the experience of being human by viewing the world from his/her own frame of reference. Each individual uses a different set of dimensions in defining oneself and judges oneself according to different sets of values.

This theory stresses the importance of an individual to experience directly and fully all the stages of development. He reckons that the "self" is the best judge of what is good or bad of any experience. As such, he stresses the importance of an individual to use his/her natural urge to try out new experiences and judge its value. Rogers (1973), states that the basic nature of the human beings when functioning fully is constructive and trustworthy. When one is freed of defensiveness and open to experience, his/her reactions are bound to be trusted as positive, forward moving and to be constructive. Such a person is able to socialize because of his/her need to affiliate and communicate with others.

This theory guides this study because Rogers shows that every child, including orphans, requires acceptance from the parents. They also require climate and good environment for actualization. Carl Rogers' self theory puts emphasis on conducive environment for self exploration resulting into better growth. In this view, if the society would treat children of both genders equally,

probably gender would have no effect on development of self-esteem.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design adopted by this study was survey, which employed casual-comparative approach. This study design was found suitable for this study since the phenomenon under investigation was already in existence. This research design used questionnaires or interview schedule to collect data from participants in a sample about their characteristics, options, and experiences, in order to generalize to the population (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). This design therefore suited this study as the study set to get opinions and attitudes of orphans and non orphan students. The study was carried out in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties of Kenya.

Target Population

The study targeted from one to form four students in secondary school, both male and female enrolled in public secondary schools in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties, Kenya. The total population of students in the registered schools is 58,492.

Sampling technique and sample size

The sampling techniques used in this study included purposive, used to sample the schools and the orphans. The schools were purposively sampled according to the high number of total orphans registered. The researcher picked 11 provincial and district secondary schools to participate in the study. The orphans were also purposively selected by use of class register. Another sampling method used in this study was simple random sampling. Students from two parent families were sampled using simple random sampling.

The school sample size was 11 provincial and district secondary schools picked to participate in the study. Out of the 11 schools, students from two parent families were sampled using simple random sampling technique while orphan students were purposively selected. In random sampling, the researcher wrote yes or no on the papers which were mixed and stirred properly and asked the class teacher to pick any depending on the number required in every school. In every school, the number of students from two parent families was to match the number of total orphans thus the sample size was 426 as indicated on Table 1. With the help of class register, the class teachers identified the orphan students. These techniques were necessary considering the characteristics of the schools and respondent needed for this study. Table 1 shows how sampling was done.

Table 1: School Sample by Population and Number of Orphans

	Provincial Schools	District Schools	Total
Boys	2,180	910	3,090
Girls	2,130	758	2,888
Orphan: Boys	65	56	121
Girls	51	41	92
Two Parent: Boys	65	56	121
Girls	51	41	92

Table 2: Orphans Self-Esteem Mean by Gender

Gender	N	Self-esteem mean (\bar{x})
Male	68	59.25
Female	102	53.11

Table 3: Orphans by Self-Esteem Category

Gender	Self-esteem category						Total	%
	Low	%	Moderate	%	High	%		
Male	31	45.6	45.58	51.5	2	2.9	68	100
Female	65	63.7	63.70	52.3	1	1.5	102	100

Table 4: Orphans' Self-Esteem by Gender

Variable	χ^2	Df	Sign
Orphans	6.589	1	.010

RESULTS

The second research question stated, Is there any significant relationship between gender of the orphans and students self-esteem? It had been hypothesized that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender of the orphans and students' self-esteem. It was important to get the self-esteem mean of orphans by their gender. Table 2 indicates the results.

Table 2 indicates that male orphan's students had a higher mean of self-esteem than female orphan students. These results necessitated analyzing the self-esteem of orphans by gender and the category of self-esteem. Table 3 shows the self-esteem of orphans by self-esteem categories.

From Table 3, 45.6 percent of male orphans had low self-esteem, 51.5 percent had moderate self-esteem level while 2.9 percent had high self-esteem level. The female orphan student's 63.7 percent registered low self-esteem

while 1.5 percent recorded low self-esteem while 1.5 percent recorded low self-esteem. Among the female orphan students 52.3 registered a moderate self-esteem.

These findings are in agreement with Brack, Orr & Ingersoll 1988 in Pole – Lunch, Myers, Kilmertin, Forssman Falk & Kliever (1998) who found out that gender differences were reported in adolescent self-esteem with boys reporting relatively higher levels of self-esteem than girls. Chi – square run and the results of the analysis are shown on Table 4.

The findings on Table 4 indicate that there is a statistical significant relationship between gender of the orphan and the self-esteem ($\chi^2 = 6.589, p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The research question stated: Is there any significant relationship between gender of the orphans and students'

self-esteem? The hypothesis stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender of the orphans and students' self-esteem.

The results indicated that there was a statistical significant difference between gender of orphans and students' self-esteem

Based on the result, the hypothesis (H₀₁) suggesting that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender of the orphans and self-esteem was rejected. There seems to be difference on gender, both male and female orphans seem not to suffer similar environmental, social and cultural influences (society where males are highly esteemed preferred and more respected than females- patriarch society) and are not affected comparatively to a similar extent.

The theory guiding the study is the self theory by Carl Rogers as indicated in the theoretical framework. Rogers contends that to enhance healthy development of the self, a conducive environment must be provided. This is a climate in which the child can experience fully, can accept itself and can be accepted by the parents even if they disapprove of particular types of behaviour. Since the female orphans registering lower self-esteem than male orphans, it might suggest that female orphans suffer from factors inhibiting self exploration. This might mean that the female orphans are more affected by lack of conducive environment than male orphans. This probably hinders a healthy development of self-esteem in female orphans and this may be reflected in classroom work. The gender difference in self-esteem of orphans may be explained by different socializations (Guthman et al 2002 in Kiyapi 2007). Though orphaned, boys registered a better self-esteem than the girls, probably boys still feel that they are the most valued in the society where the study was conducted as the society view the boy child with esteem while the girls are looked down upon. Indeed, Segal and Yahrees (1978) observed that social devaluation comes self-devaluation and self crippling damage self-esteem of female orphans.

This might be true with the orphan girls who registered low self-esteem probably after devaluation by the society. As it is viewed on development of self esteem, approval of others and specifically the parents is a factor that enhances the development of self-esteem of the child. Moreover, Robinson (1995) in Steinberg (1999) in his studies found that self-esteem is enhanced by having the approval of others especially of parents and peers.

Therefore, something of importance to note is that social cultural expectations are gender dependent and there are gender differences in their association without discrimination of female orphans. It might also be true that girls are having their self-esteem systematically destroyed by sexism and harassment.

On the other hand, boys are said to be encouraged by the society to take responsibilities as they are taken to perpetrate the name of family. Indeed Elegbellye and Okeke (2004 in Kiyapi 2007) put forward that the gender

variations of self esteem are likely to distinguish the types of influence exerted by the society. Girls' self-esteem tends to be lower and more vulnerable than boys' (Watkins, Dong & Xia 1997); Byrne 2000, Miyamoto et al (2000) in Fildman (2007). Society's stereotypical gender expectations may lead boys to feel that they should be confident, tough and fearless all the time thus influencing the development of self-esteem.

Generally, all human beings deserve to be highly esteemed, or motivated for that matter, in order to yield substantially in their various fields of life be it in politics, religion, education and so forth. During the pan-Africanists campaigns, in the so-called Pan-African Movement of the 1900's, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), one of the key proponents and architects, moved all over the black dominated areas of West Indies and America stressing on the need for Africans to get motivated and make the best out of their lives without necessarily leaning helplessly on their European counterparts for help. He would urge them to focus on their potentials and not on their deficiencies. In particular, he urged Africans in the Diaspora to ignore the propaganda that unlike the Europeans, the blacks are imperfect creation. To the black mothers he said: "Mothers! Give your children dolls that look like them to play with and cuddle. They will learn, as they grow older to love and care for their own children and not neglect them." He went on: "Men and women, God made us as his (sic) perfect creation. He made no mistake when he made us Africans with kinky hair. It was a divine purpose for us to live in our natural habitat – the tropical zones of the earth" (Gathogo 2001:109). In paraphrasing this, God made both boy and girl-children as species that need not have low self-esteem in order to co-work effectively in God's vineyard, particularly as they grow to responsible citizens of the land. In the schema of things, it is incumbent upon scholars of education, and other disciplines, to dismantle the many bridges of pessimism, particularly with regard to the case of the girl-child, in order to motivate the society to develop self-esteem as hallmarks for authentic and holistic growth. In other words, the quest for a highly esteemed society, across the gender divide, is a virtue that has been pursued by any enlightened society throughout history. The above scenario is thus no exception.

Similarly, scholars in African women's theology have insisted on the need for a girl-child to stand firm amidst gender imbalances and their resultant low self-esteem. In their approach to Christology (doctrine and study of Christ), they have encouraged the society in general to view Christ as not only their liberator but also as an iconoclastic prophet who stands out in scriptures as a critic of status quo particularly when it engenders social injustices and marginalization of some in the society. In building on the self esteem of religious society, they see Christ as one who speaks for the voiceless, as a fair servant of all genders, a friend of all, as the lightener of

burdens, and as real and as one who satisfies any circumstance. Mercy Oduyoye stresses that the Christ whom African women worship, honour and depends on is the victorious Christ (Oduyoye 2001:54). He is the victorious Christ whom the African women who turned to the African Instituted Churches (AIC's) found the hidden Christ of the 'Western Churches.' According to her, they discovered Christ's 'power to heal, willingness to suffer with those who suffer, and his joy of liberation' (Oduyoye 2001:56). They found the Christ who declared that he had come to set the captives free, to give sight to the blind, wholeness to the lame and to proclaim good news to the poor (Luke 4:18-20).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of data presented and discussion done, the following conclusion was made:

- (i) Orphans' self-esteem is influenced by his or her gender. This implies that since self-esteem is a psychological construct which refers to how the self is viewed and valued, probably the society devalued the female orphans and from the societal devaluation comes individual devaluation.
- (ii) Since self-esteem is human necessity without which no human progress is possible, there is need for the African society, just as in the rest of the world, to insist on hope rather than despair in all departments of life. And if a "culture of encouragement" as opposed to "the old culture of pulling one another down" in Africa is dismantled through research and publications, vices such as sexism, xenophobia, negative ethnicity and racism would be a thing of the past. Certainly, injustice to a girl-child is an injustice to every human being; as injustice somewhere is injustice everywhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From our findings, the study recommends that there is need to focus on attitude change as well as changes in values and behaviour towards girl child and the processes of socialization so as to enhance self-esteem of orphaned girls. As such both sex should be treated the same by the society in attempt to enhance self-esteem of the orphan girls. Certainly, the societal change of attitude is critical in moving the society to a higher rite of passage.

Certainly, human progress is badly hampered by negative attitudes; for if we are already deeply convinced of not being able to change certain things, or reach specific goals we won't succeed in those projects. Negative mindsets discourage us and even worse: we don't have the willingness to make huge efforts to reach very difficult goals. We lack in self-consciousness and do not believe in our abilities, due to our negative mindsets. As Winston Churchill (1874-1965) once noted, "attitude is

a little thing that makes a big difference." Indeed, our attitude towards others determines their attitude towards us. As in the words of the American statesman and diplomat -the 65th United States Secretary of State and the first African American to serve in that position -Colin Powell (1937 -), if we want to achieve excellence in big things, we must "develop the habit in little matters. [For] excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude." With the right attitude from all genders, irrespective of age, colour or creed, the self-esteem of a girl-child will be restored for the good of the African society and beyond.

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