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Examining the relationship between child neglect and secondary schoolgirl dropouts in Tanzania: A case of Arusha City

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Article Info

Abstract

The study examined the aspects of child neglect relative to secondary schoolgirl dropouts (SSD) in Arusha City, Tanzania, focusing on secondary schoolgirl's in-school and out of school in public schools. The study used mixed-method research using cross-sectional and case-study designs. The sample size for the cross-sectional survey was 300 respondents, and six informants were reached for interviews. The regression analysis demonstrated that the failure to prevent truancy is the most important predictor variable (β=.46, p < .000) that explained the risk of secondary schoolgirl dropouts for in-schoolgirls sample. For out of schoolgirls sample, the results showed that failure to prevent truancy (β= .38, p < .000), followed by inability to provide food, clothes and school materials (β= .32, p< .000) and, failure to provide shelter, rest and safety (β= .32, p <.000). These findings underpinned Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory arguments that without caregiver's fulfilling schoolgirl needs resulted to the risks of SSD while other students dropped out. The study concludes with recommendations for targeted community sensitization interventions to encourage parents and guardians to emphasize care for their schoolgirls enrolled in secondary education. And, to retain out of schoolgirls related to child neglect to access informal education.

Introduction

Secondary education, particularly form four secondary education, is a crucial level of education in Tanzania for girls' and boys' employability and increased human capital (UNESCO, 2022). Yet, before the end of their studies, the number of school dropouts increases daily (Ems & Mnjokava, 2022; UNESCO, 2022; URT, 2018). Accordingly, such effects resulted in the country's decreased production, creativity and economic growth (UNESCO, 2015). Also, it negatively affects an individual's growth and well-being (Mahmnda, 2019; Breton, 2004).

Schoolgirls are more vulnerable to dropping out of secondary school than boys in Tanzania (HakiElimu, 2020). The factors associated with schoolgirls' dropout are socioeconomic, cultural and political factors that are possibly associated with child neglect (HakiElimu, 2020). This is because caregivers fail to do their responsibilities to prevent truancy; fail to provide food, school uniforms, shelter, and fail to protect their schoolgirls; and fail to provide healthcare (HakiElimu, 2020). Consequently, schoolgirls drop out due to early marriage, early pregnancy, insufficient schools, school materials and teachers; sexual harassment from homes as well as schools; and failure to access female pads that make them uncomfortable in a school environment. Thus, increases truancy and school dropout.

In most developing countries such as Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, most parents and guardians are living in poverty (Ems & Mnjokava, 2022; Mahmnda, 2019; Kiboi, 2018) [6, 8]. With such socioeconomic status, they fail to support the basic

needs of their schoolgirls (Ems & Mnjokava, 2022; Mahmnda, 2019; Kiboi, 2018) [6,8]. For instance, the provision of food, shelter, clothes, healthcare, safety, school uniforms and other school expenses (Ems & Mnjokava, 2022; Mahmnda, 2019; Kiboi, 2018) [6, 8]. A large number of schoolgirls turn out to be victims of that scenario and resulted to school dropout (Ems & Mnjokava, 2022; Mahmnda, 2019; Kiboi, 2018; Dubowitz, 2013; Armstrong *et al.*, 2005) [6, 2, 8]. In Bangladesh, school dropout was not only caused by poverty though it was the root cause (Mahmnda, 2019; Nath *et al.*, 2017). Also, it is caused by gender inequalities, where parents prefer to motivate and give financial support to boys' students for their education rather than girl students (Mahmnda, 2019; Nath *et al.*, 2017). Thus, girl students were placed in a position of having a limited time to rest and do private studies at home by doing a lot of domestic work (Mahmnda, 2019; Nath *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, schoolgirls perform poorly academically such that many drop out of school (Mahmnda, 2019; Nath *et al.*, 2017).

United Republic of Tanzania (URT) (2020) reported the same scenarios of school dropouts that it has been occurring in Tanzania over the past years up to now. Education Regional Statistics in 2020 reported that there was 91.6 percent of secondary school dropouts related to truancy, and for some reason, every year (URT, 2020). Though the Tanzania Government did not sit back, it has initiated actions to reduce school dropouts and increase secondary school enrollment for both boys and girls students. Such actions included reformed the National Education and Training Policy in 2014 and allowing fee-free secondary education by 2015 (URT, 2015). Thus, all public secondary schools were called upon to increase secondary school enrollments for boys and girls students (URT, 2015). The government also, amended the Education Act in 2017 which prohibits marrying and impregnating a secondary schoolgirl as a crime and an unlawful act (URT, 2017b). It was also, introduced Tanzania Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project – Alternative Education Pathways (SEQUIP-AEP) to provide opportunities for secondary school students who were dropouts for different reasons including child neglect and early pregnancy to return to school and finish their secondary education in informal selected centres (URT, 2022a). The Tanzania Government also, established the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) in 2000 (National Bureau Statistics *et al.*, 2016). It supports poor communities to improve their lives and be able to support their dependents, particularly boys and girls at school by providing them with basic needs for accomplishing their education levels (National Bureau Statistics *et al.*, 2016). Despite actions put in place to resolve constant secondary school dropouts in the country. But still, secondary schoolgirl dropouts persist in Tanzania (URT, 2020).

Studies global, regional and local indicated that Secondary Schoolgirl Dropout was associated with child neglect (Ems & Mnjokava, 2022; Mahmnda, 2019; Kiboi, 2018) [6, 8]. Child neglect was defined as the failure of parents, guardians or caregivers to provide for a child's basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, safety, education, health and care (Dubowitz, 2013). This study also, observed that child neglect has a high association with persistent secondary schoolgirl dropouts in Arusha City and, it contributes to ongoing policy discussion and practice for community sensitization interventions to encourage parents and guardians to emphasize care for their schoolgirls enrolled in secondary education. And, retain out of schoolgirls related to child neglect to access informal education.

Methodology
The study examined the aspects of child neglect relative to secondary schoolgirl dropouts (SSD) in Arusha City, Tanzania, focusing on secondary schoolgirl's in-school and out of school in government schools. The study used mixed-method research using cross-sectional and case-study designs. The sample size for the cross-sectional survey was 300 respondents and six informants were reached for interviews. Through purposively sample selected officials for consultation and a simple random sampling procedure was performed to select 50 schoolgirl's in-school from each three secondary schools and 50 schoolgirls out of school from three each informal education centres which made a total of 300 respondents whom questionnaires were evenly distributed to them. The study also, applied the snowball sampling technique to get representative from all angles to triangulate the informants. Quantitative data used Multiple Regression used to assess the relationship between aspects of child neglect and secondary schoolgirl dropouts to understand the cause and effect between variables (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. Qualitative data employed content analysis to bring the discussion into content and evaluated the patterns within a piece of content obtained via in-depth interviews with six key informants including one CSEO, one CAEO, one Program manager, one Head teacher and two Parents or guardians expressed their experiences on the matter (Neuendorf, 2017).

Findings
The study employed a regression analysis test between child neglect and secondary schoolgirl dropouts. The regression analysis test results established the relationship between the aspects of child neglect and secondary schoolgirl dropouts for in-school girls and out of schoolgirls. Table 1 shows that the Coefficient of failure to prevent truancy, inability to provide food, clothes and school materials, failure to provide healthcare, as well as failure to provide shelter, rest and safety as predictors of SSD for in-schoolgirls and the associated P-values, which were less than the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Regression analysis of aspects of Child Neglect and Secondary Schoolgirl Dropouts for in-schoolgirls sample

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.912	.095		9.575	.000
	Failure to prevent truancy	.196	.026	.456	7.452	.000
	Inability to provide food, clothes and school materials	.129	.028	.241	4.583	.000
	Failure to provide healthcare	.169	.031	.289	5.492	.000
	Failure to provide shelter, rest and safety	.100	.028	.216	3.515	.001

Source: Field data, 2025

1. Dependent Variable: SSD
Regression analysis results in Table 1 show the coefficient beta value of failure to prevent truancy was (β= .46, p < .000). The inability to provide food, clothes and school materials (β= .24, p < .000). The failure to provide healthcare (β= .29, p < .000) while the failure to provide shelter, rest and safety (β= .22, p < .01). Therefore, the statistics suggest that failure to prevent truancy is the most important variable in the regression model that explains the risk of SSD for in-schoolgirls by having the strongest standardized coefficient beta value (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4].

The regression model suggests that for each additional failure to prevent truancy, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.196, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. For each additional inability to provide food, clothes and school materials, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.129, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. Besides, for each additional failure to provide healthcare, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.169, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee

& Simonoff, 2013) [4]. Additionally, for each additional failure to provide shelter, rest and safety, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.100, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. In-addition, the predictor variables (aspects of child neglect) explain 71.1 percent of the variation of SSD in Arusha City (R^2 = .711). Therefore, based on this coefficient, other factors that were not considered in this study contributed to 29.8 percent (1-0.711=0.298) of the variability of secondary schoolgirls at the risk of dropout in Arusha City (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. Henceforth, the mode summary illustrated that there was a strong positive relationship between CN and SSD for in-schoolgirls.

As for OSG, the regression analysis results show the standardized coefficients of failure to prevent truancy, inability to provide food, clothes and school materials, failure to provide healthcare, as well as failure to provide shelter, rest and safety. As predictors of SSD for out of schoolgirls. And, the results show the associated P-value of each predictor, whereby all were less than the 0.05 level of significance (see Table 2).

Table 2: Regression analysis of aspects of Child Neglect and Secondary Schoolgirl Dropouts for out of schoolgirls sample

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.915	.128		7.125	.000
	Failure to prevent truancy	.137	.020	.382	6.946	.000
	Inability to provide food, clothes and school materials	.133	.021	.322	6.449	.000
	Failure to provide healthcare	.091	.028	.165	3.233	.002
	Failure to provide shelter, rest and safety	.214	.031	.324	6.903	.000

Source: Field data, 2025

2. Dependent Variable: SSD
The regression analysis results of out of schoolgirls in Table 2 unveiled the standardized coefficient of failure to prevent truancy (β= .38, p < .000) while the inability to provide food, clothes and school materials (β= .32, p < .000) while failure to provide shelter, rest and safety (β= .32, p < .000). Besides, failure to provide healthcare (β= .17, p < .02). Thus, the statistics suggest that failure to prevent truancy, and inability to provide food, clothes and school materials as well as failure to provide shelter, rest and safety are the most important variables in the regression model that explains SSD for out of schoolgirls by having the strongest beta values (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4].

The regression model indicated that for each additional failure to prevent truancy, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.137, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. For each additional inability to provide food, clothes and school materials, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.133, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. Besides, for each additional failure to provide healthcare, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.91, assuming that all other variables are held constant. Also, for each additional failure to provide shelter, rest and safety, the average expected increase in SSD is 0.214, assuming that all other variables are held constant (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4].

Further, the study predictor variables (aspects of child neglect) explain 71.9 percent of the variation of SSD in Arusha City (R^2 = .719). Therefore, based on this coefficient, other factors that were not considered in this

study contributed to 28.1 percent (1-0.719=0.28.1) of the variability of out of schoolgirls dropped out at secondary education in Arusha City (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013) [4]. Hence, the mode summary illustrated that there was a strong positive relationship between CN and SSD and thus, strongly explained SSD for out of OSG in Arusha City.

In this regard, based on the hypothesis of this study 'there is no significant correlation between CN and SSD in Arusha City'. Therefore, based on the study results, the study rejected the null hypothesis study. Hence, realized a significant relationship between CN and SSD in Arusha city secondary schools.

Further, interviews with schoolgirl parents in Arusha. Provided the information that revealed there was a strong association between aspects of child neglect and secondary schoolgirl dropouts. The interviewees elaborated:

Parent 1: One of the schoolgirl's parents indirectly admitted to neglecting her due to insufficient school expenses and other related expenses. They include pocket money, school examination costs, transport costs and school materials (including uniforms, shoes, books and exercise books) and deficient coverage of health needs of a schoolgirl (like buying female pads or treatment when sick). Instead, caregivers urged schoolgirls to use local ways. Thus, the parent said that it is not that parents do not want to provide for their schoolgirls, but this is due to low socioeconomic reasons that limit them from being able to afford those related educational needs (Parent 1, interviewed on 13/4/2025).

Parent 1: One parent said that it is hard for her to supervise a person with secondary education since she is less educated. So, a parent feels incompetent to supervise the school progress of her schoolgirl. Again, the parent said that life difficulties take most of her time working, and she has less time to supervise the schoolgirl's development and less time to ask the schoolgirl about the school environment or home environment that pertains to the limited schoolgirl's educational progress (Parent 1, interviewed on 14/4/2025).

Guardian 1: To be honest, I cannot afford to buy new school materials (including uniforms, shoes, pens and exercise books) every year for my daughter. I have other children waiting for the same services or other vital care. But when I managed to buy those school materials once a year, she will continue to use them for the next coming years in other classes (Guardian 1, interviewed on 13/4/2025).

Parent 1: Normally, when she feels sick, I buy her medicine from the pharmacy, not to send her to the hospital. This is because I cannot afford healthcare costs (obtained on 14/4/2025). Moreover, parent 2: I have never bought sanitary pads for her. It is a waste of money because I taught her how to use local ways that we used before these modern sanitary pads (Parent 1, interviewed on 14/4/2025).

Guardian 1: I have three children, one of them is in secondary school. It is hard to ensure that every day she goes to school with pocket money and transport fare because of my limited earnings. So, most of the time, she is forced to go to school without either of those (Guardian 1, interviewed on 13/4/2025).

Therefore, these findings from interviews suggest that parents neglected their schoolgirls due to poor socioeconomic factors. As resulted in negative impacts on schoolgirls' educational achievement. Thus, all such situations put some schoolgirls at risk of dropout while others failed to continue with secondary education.

Conclusion
The study concludes that child neglect is related to secondary schoolgirl dropouts. Also, it was noted that schoolgirls were neglected by their caregivers in many ways, which resulted in secondary education dropouts. The aspects of neglect that derived from forms of child neglect were linked to the study, including caregivers' failure to prevent truancy, inability to provide food, clothes and school materials, failure to provide healthcare, as well as failure to provide shelter, rest and safety. However, it was disclosed that child neglect and secondary schoolgirl dropouts were associated with the poor socio-economic status of the schoolgirl's families due to the nature of less-earning occupations and the low level of education of caregivers. All resulted in difficulties in sustaining daily physical needs that hindered the educational achievement of schoolgirls and led to secondary education dropouts. Also, disclosed that child neglect did not occur only in separated or divorced marital couples, but also occurred in married couples and led to schoolgirl dropouts.

Recommendation
To address this challenge, caregivers themselves should first take a step to end up neglecting their schoolgirls, for it to be possible, educational and other related non-governmental organisations are requested to design a sensitization program for caregivers to value the best practice for childcare, health and education. Also, civil society organisations should sustainably work with the government to enable out of schoolgirls related to child neglect to access informal education. The Local Government Authorities (LGAs) should ensure the anti-poverty programs, as a Productive Social Safety Net under TASAF, are implemented by enlightening the conditions for school attendance, particularly for schoolgirls in secondary education, for eligible households to receive cash transfers.

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