

# **Consequences of Failure of Pupils to Attend School during Funerals in Asego Division, Homa Bay Sub County, Kenya**

By

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## **Abstract**

*Regular school attendance is very important to pupils. This study investigated the consequences of failure of pupils to attend school during funerals in Asego Division, Homa-Bay Sub County. The objectives of this study were to find out consequences of poor school attendance of pupils and gender differences in school attendance during funerals. Eight primary schools in Asego Division were sampled for this study. Two hundred and forty Luo pupils in classes four to eight in the sampled schools were purposively sampled as participants and descriptive survey research design was used. Questionnaires were administered to the sampled pupils. Focus group discussions for teachers were held in the sampled schools. They were chaired by the researcher with the assistance of two enumerators. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics such as means, frequency distributions, percentages and standard deviations. The findings of this study were presented in tables and in prose. The findings showed that consequences of poor school attendance were poor academic performance 35%, poor concentration in classes 24%, school dropout 18%, class repetition 9%, juvenile delinquency 8%, and indiscipline 6%. There was no gender difference in school attendance during funerals. The study concluded that failure of pupils to attend school during funerals had negative consequences to both male and female pupils. Further research was recommended to investigate guidance and counseling services offered to bereaved pupils during funerals. A similar study can be replicated in other parts of Homa Bay County and other parts of Kenya.*

**Keywords:** *Culture, Relative, School attendance, Loss, Gender*

## **1. Background to the study**

Majority of people who lived in Asego Division were members of the Luo community except in urban zone which was cosmopolitan. Even though regular school attendance was very important to pupils, Mboya (1997) notes that the Luos believe that after physical death, the deceased will be incorporated into ancestral community. That belief made attendance of funeral ceremonies a must for every Luo. The bereaved members of the deceased family were not permitted to leave home or go to work in the fields. Such prohibitions made bereaved pupils not to attend school until after the deceased was buried and purification done to family members, hence pupils participated in mourning rituals.

House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts: Department for Education and Skills (2006) report that regular absence from school is damaging, making a young person vulnerable to involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour and much more likely to leave school with few or no qualification. It also disrupts the education of other pupils because teachers have to spend time helping poor attendees catch up with work that they had missed. Kafui (2005) reports on causes of low academic performance of primary school pupils in the Shama sub Metro of Shama Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly in Ghana that absenteeism causes poor performance. He carried out a survey study on 427 candidates and found that the effect of irregular school attendance was that material that was taught was difficult to understand when studied on one's own. Continued missing of classes also resulted in loss of content and knowledge. The result was that assignments and exercises could not be correctly done leading to low academic performance.

Nakanyike, Kasente, and Balihuta (2003) carried out a case study of 16 primary schools where 160 pupils were interviewed and 12 members of the community participated including representative teachers and parents and found that lack of school requirement particularly for boys and losing parents particularly for

girls caused poor school attendance which led to dropout. These dropouts resulted in wastage of financial and human resources; a doubling of universal primary education cost; a failure of students to master basic knowledge and skills; and failure to attain the overall objective of transforming Uganda into a developed society and subsequently eradicating poverty from the nation. When a pupil was frequently absent or failed to master a minimum of skills and competencies, and was forced to repeat the grade, the cost to educate that pupil doubled. Because any pupil who dropped out before primary 5 would not have mastered literacy, the cost of his or her education would therefore have been wasteful. The governments' policy of poverty eradication aimed at educating all children to the end of primary level would have been let down if children did not stay in schools.

Ngwala (1984) analyzed factors that contributed to pupil absenteeism in Central Division of Machakos District. In his survey study of 18 primary schools, he found that children who did not attend school regularly were unlikely to be well-prepared to face hard realities of life, there were high chances of performance in examinations being affected negatively, and the child found difficulty in forming friendly links with other children.

Bironga (2002) found in his survey study of factors responsible for students' absenteeism in Ruiru Division, Kenya, that absenteeism from school led to educational wastage, students who were persistently absent from school had low educational attainment which led to repetition and students eventually dropped out of school. This study explored the consequences of failure of pupils to attend school and gender difference during funerals in Asego Division, Homa Bay Sub County.

### ***Theoretical framework***

This study was guided by Bowlby's theory of attachment, separation and loss. Bowlby (1980) describes four predominant reactions that occur when one has experienced a loss. These included numbness- in the first few days after the death, the bereaved person was in a daze, underneath that numbness and shock was a sense of being on the verge of bursting and painful emotions broke through; yearning- the grieving person had feelings of panic, bouts of uncontrollable weeping and physical aches and pains, he or she was extremely restless, suffered from insomnia, and preoccupied with thoughts of the loved one and of the events leading to the death; disorganization and despair- as it sank that a reunion with the loved one was impossible, depression, despair and apathy increasingly predominated, and they might have difficulty managing and taking interest in their lives; reorganization- the bereaved persons began to pull themselves together again as their pangs of grief and periods of apathy became less frequent, came to invest less emotional energy in their attachment to the deceased and more in their attachment to the living, they began to feel ready for new activities and relationships or attachments. Bowlby argues that the closer and stronger the attachment, the more intense and enduring the distress of grief hence a pupil who had lost a close family member would be more likely to display intense grieving responses than those who had lost a distant relative. Those with insecure attachments or ambivalent relationships were more vulnerable to complicated or pathological grief. A pupil, who was experiencing numbness and shock, had physical aches and pains, was restless and preoccupied with thoughts of the loved one and of the events leading to the death could not attend school. This study sought to investigate consequences of failure to attend school during funerals.

Berkeley, Gertler, Levine, and Ames (2002) used parametric and non-parametric matching techniques to estimate how school enrolment was affected by a parent's recent death. Data were analyzed from 600,000 households from Indonesia. They found that a parent's recent death had a large effect on a child's school enrolment; eldest daughters who had younger siblings dropped out than were the sons. That was because the eldest daughters stepped in to perform child care and housework after a parent died. Ferguson and Johnstone (1999), in their qualitative participatory research study where they used both case studies and surveys on twelve communities in Zambia found that school dropout occurred for both genders because there was no money left to sustain orphans in school. They also found that children who had experienced HIV/AIDS in their family found school attendance hateful due to the stigma related to AIDS.

Kakuru (2008) found in his survey study of rural livelihoods, HIV/AIDS and women's activism on 36 households in Uganda that within the educational sector, measures had been put in place to facilitate achievements of gender equality. These included the implementation of universal primary education in 1997. Still, educational gender inequalities remained unabated (Nakanyike, Kasent and Balihuta, 2003). Factors responsible for the educational inequalities included patriarchal beliefs, practices and values, and HIV/AIDS. The study communities had a gender biased division of household labour and allocation of household resources. There were disparities in school attendance and inequalities in educational achievement. Women and girls undertook tasks for the benefit of members of the entire household. Females had to care for patients and orphans due to AIDS. In households that had bedridden patients, girl children missed school to supplement their mother's in care giving for the sick or taking care of younger siblings, cooking and working in the garden. Male labour was required to dig the grave and put up a shade for mourners while female labour was for food preparation and services. Some girls missed school to stand in for their mothers who were participating in funeral activities. Ayieko (1997) observes that girls are more likely than boys to be separated from other siblings to live away from home with relatives, friends or other persons after death of a parent. This study was to find out the extent to which gender of pupils influenced school attendance. It would be different from the studies above due to its location.

### ***Statement of the problem***

Despite the introduction of FPE in Kenya and making school attendance compulsory, some pupils did not attend school regularly. Obuya (2011) investigated the influence of the Luo bereavement customs on school attendance and found that Luo bereavement customs of "*padho*", suspension of regular activities, "*iko*", burial, "*tero buru*", a ritual demonstration of accompanying the spirit of the deceased to former battleground, "*liedo*", shaving, "*tedo*", serving a meal to the deceased's family by married daughters, made affected pupils to absent from school, and that affected pupils absented from school for 8 days for mothers, 5 days for fathers, 4 days for siblings, and 2 days for friends and neighbours' funerals. The tradition of Luo children being absent from school during funerals was a cause of concern.

Ayieko (1997) found that due to lack of school materials, orphans had low class attendance leading to poor academic performance. This study sought to find out whether there was policy on school attendance in the primary schools in Asego Division, consequences of poor school attendance by pupils and gender difference during funerals.

## **2. Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 81 primary schools, 65 were public while 16 were private primary schools, with a total of 622 teachers and 29,021 pupils. The pupils must have lost a parent, sibling, neighbour or friend. Stratified random sampling with proportionate allocation was used to obtain the number of public and private primary schools to use as sample. The researcher used purposive sampling to get Luo pupils as participants in this study.

There were 30 pupil participants from each sampled school hence there were 240 pupil participants. Eight teachers from each sampled school constituted a focus discussion group. 8 focus discussion groups were held and 64 teachers participated in this study. This study also used questionnaires. There were questionnaires for pupils with both closed and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions made data analysis easy. Head teachers of the sampled schools were approached with the relevant documents.

## **3. Findings and discussion**

### ***Consequences of failure of pupils to attend school during funerals***

Results presented on table 1 show the frequencies and percentages of consequences of poor school attendance of pupils during funerals.

**Table 1: Teachers' responses on consequences of absenteeism during funerals**

Consequences of absenteeism	Frequency	Percentage
Poor academic performance	22	35
Poor concentration in class	15	24
Drop out	12	18
Repetition of classes	6	9
Juvenile delinquency	5	8
Indiscipline	4	6
No response	0	0
Total	64	100

There were 64 teachers who were respondents. Twenty two teachers, translating to 35%, gave poor academic performance as a consequence of absenteeism during funerals. Bironga (2000) reported that students who were persistently absent from school had low educational attainment which led to repetition of classes and the students eventually dropped out of school. Similar findings were also reported by Mukhongo (2003) who found that poor school attendance led to poor performance in internal exams. Kafui (2005) also reports that absenteeism causes poor academic performance. When pupils missed several lessons, they performed poorly in exams due to the content they missed. The bereaved pupils could not perform well in tests done after funerals because they missed some concepts that were taught when they were away. The materials taught when one was away were difficult to understand when studied on one's own. The result was that assignments and exercises could not be properly and correctly done leading to low academic performance. The bereaved pupils did not understand the subsequent concepts taught after the missed ones since the syllabuses were spiral in nature.

Fifteen respondents, equivalent to 24% of the sample said it resulted in poor concentration in class by the affected pupils. Munthali (2002) reported that children orphaned by AIDS and orphaned by other reasons had lost many of their parents' assets during the period of illness and to relatives and that the general lack of food and income were real worries for orphaned children. Segendo and Nambi (1997) also reported that there was movement of orphans from upper class urban home to a poor relative's home and separation from siblings. Those who chose not to move lived on their own, constituting child-headed families. Ayieko (1997) also reported that when the surviving parent was ailing and was becoming incapable of attending to family needs, some children started worrying of being separated. During lessons, some bereaved pupils did not concentrate in class because they thought of their new states at home. There were changes such as from having a parent to a state of being an orphan. After the deceased's assets had been used during the funeral, the orphans did not concentrate in class for they thought of where and how they would get their next meals when they were in child headed households. They thought of the new environments they found themselves in when adopted, for instance, when they moved from upper to low economic status families. Some bereaved pupils copied notes as teachers were teaching because they wanted to have the notes they missed. Some bereaved pupils fell asleep in class due to tiredness after doing a lot of work at home. Some became asleep in class because of insomnia they had during the funerals. Lack of concentration during lessons made them not to get new concepts taught in class.

Twelve respondents, equivalent to 18% of the respondents said it resulted in school dropouts. Similar finding was also reported by USAID (2003) that as a result of losing parents, children dropped out of school. Munthali (2002) also found that they dropped out of school if they didn't have uniforms, books and other writing materials. Nakanyike, Kasente and Balihuta (2003) had similar findings that poor school attendance led to dropout from school. Ferguson and Johnstone (1999) reported that school dropout occurred for both genders. There was no money left to sustain orphans in school, therefore, the affected pupils dropped out because of hopelessness. Boys went out to look for paying jobs while girls

dropped out due to pregnancy or early marriages. The orphans dropped out of school because some of the relatives or parents' friends who adopted them did not give them an opportunity to go to school but instead to work for them in their homes. Some male and female pupils dropped out of school as they joined traditional dancers such as 'ohangla' dancers who came to entertain mourners at the funeral. Some girls were involved in early marriages or became pregnant due to the fact that 'oche'- sons in law and other mourners spent a night out in the erected shades on the deceased's compound. Some of the mourners convinced the girls and made them pregnant or went away with them as wives.

Six teachers representing 9% gave repetition of classes by affected pupils as a consequence of poor school attendance. Bironga (2002) reported that persistent absenteeism led to low educational attainment, which led to repetition of classes and eventually to school dropout. Teachers put pass marks for each class. Failure to score the minimum marks required by teachers made pupils to be forced to repeat classes. Some parents also wanted their children to score very high marks. Failure to score the high marks required by parents made some pupils to be forced to repeat classes. Even though the Ministry of Education was against repetition of classes by pupils, teachers colluded with the affected pupils' parents or guardians and made them to repeat classes. Some guardians made the children they adopted to repeat classes when the guardians foresaw that they were going to have difficulties in paying secondary school fees for the pupils.

Five teachers accounting for 8% gave juvenile delinquency as a consequence of absenteeism. Similar findings were reported by House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts: Department for Education and Skills (2006) that absence from school was damaging, making a young person vulnerable to involvement in crime and anti-social behavior. When mourners came to the home of the deceased, they placed their bags and other belongings in any house in which they found space. Doors in a deceased's compound were usually unlocked hence some children picked or stole what they found on their way. Some pupils joined gangs that broke into houses in the deceased's neighborhood and took away items. They destroyed other peoples' property such as the fences which they passed through after stealing items from the houses. To release some tension, some pupils raped young children.

Six percent of the teachers said indiscipline was a consequence of poor school attendance. The finding is similar to that of Mukhongo (2003) that reports that circumcision ceremony has a negative influence on pupils' school attendance which eventually leads to indiscipline. Poor academic achievement led to repetition of classes which lowered the pupils' self esteem. Some bereaved pupils failed to follow school rules. They made noise in their classes. Some of their remaining parents or guardians also reported to teachers that the pupils disobeyed them and were not following the rules at home. They became unruly. These tainted the images of the schools. Their remaining parents asked the teachers to assist them in helping the pupils to be disciplined.

**Gender differences in school attendance during funerals**

Results presented on table 2 show gender differences in school attendance during funerals. The total numbers of respondents who absented from school because of Luo customs and traditions such as "padho", "iko" "liedo", "tero buru" and "tedo" for different funeral during school going days were used.

**Table 2: Gender differences in school attendance during funerals**

Variables	Males		Females		Total	
	freq	%	freq	%	freq	%
Losses						
Mothers	12	5	7	2.9	19	7.9
Fathers	21	8.7	6	2.5	27	11.3
Siblings	4	1.7	13	5.4	17	7.1
Friends	2	0.8	7	2.9	9	3.8
Neighbours	4	1.7	12	5.0	16	6.7
No response	67	27.9	85	35.4	152	63.3
Total	110	45.8	130	54.2	240	100

All the 12 male respondents constituting 5% and all the 7 female respondents constituting 2.9% of the sample, who lost their mothers during the school-going days absented from school to attend the funerals of their mothers. All the 21 male respondents accounting for 8.7% and all the 6 female respondents representing 2.5%, who lost their fathers during the school going days absented from school to attend the funerals of their fathers. All the 4 male respondents representing 1.7% and all the 13 female respondents representing 5.4% of the sample, who lost their siblings during school-going days absented from school to attend the funerals of their siblings. All the 2 male respondents representing 0.8% and all the 7 female respondents representing 2.9% of the sample, who lost friends during the school going days absented from school to attend their friend's funerals. All the 4 male respondents representing 1.7% and all the 12 female respondents representing 5%, who had lost neighbours during school-going days absented from school to attend their neighbors' funerals. Sixty seven male respondents representing 27.9% and 85 female respondents representing 35.4% had not experienced any losses during school going days. The findings of this study were different from the report given by Kakuru (2008) who found that there were disparities in school attendance as girls missed school to stand in for their mothers who were participating in funeral activities while boys were less affected. In this study, there was no gender difference in school attendance during the funerals as attending the funerals was binding to both the male and female respondents.

The findings of this study were similar to that of Shino (1997) who reported that from the day following the death, the surviving family members and relatives of the deceased busied themselves to prepare for the burial service. When nuclear family members were lost, both male and female pupils were compelled to be absent from school. They participated in different ceremonies and rituals. They were also involved in running errands. When friends or neighbors were lost, some girls missed school to stand in for their mothers who were participating in funeral activities. Some girls were fetching water for use in the preparation of meals. Boys helped in the erection of shades, clearing the deceased's compound and in splitting firewood. Both male and female pupils who were lazy and found schoolwork to be difficult absented from school to participate in the activities at the deceased's compound.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Failure of pupils to attend school during funerals had negative consequences to both male and female pupils.

#### **5. Recommendations**

It was recommended that a study be carried out to investigate guidance and counseling services offered to bereaved pupils during funerals. A similar study can be replicated in other parts of Homa Bay County and other parts of Kenya.

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