



PARENTS' CHILD PREFERENCE FOR EDUCATION IN IMENTI NORTH COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: *This paper explores the parents' child preference for education of pre-school age going children in Miriga Mieru West Division of Imenti North County, Kenya. To establish this parent's demographic information on marital status, religion, age, education level and child preference was collected. The findings are discussed in this paper.*

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BACK GROUND

Contemporary household is characterized by each parent's utility function, which is shaped by their own preferences (Vermeulan 2002). This means in this paper that, when finances are constrained or are not enough the decision on whether the little available is spent on educating children or not depends on a parents preference also whether to use the resources in educating a male or a female child. Consequently, preferences have a large impact on the well-being of children. Resources invested in a child are determined not only by the level of resources available, but also by a parent's preferences (Vermeulan 2002). Preferences between parents need not be the same; therefore outcomes of mothers' and fathers' actions can differ (Brown & Park 2002). While this can benefit the children, Children from the Meru community may not have this benefit, gender of the parents was not considered since almost exclusively young children especially in the pre-school years are associated with mothers, fathers associate themselves with children when they are all grown up, even though this is the case there were men parents who participated in this study.

To exercise preferences, a parent must have the ability to do so (Rubalcava, Teruel & Thomas 2004). The work by Haddad & Hoddinott in 1994, suggests that bargaining power over household economic decisions, especially when held by women, is associated with improved well-being for herself and her children than when the same resources are in the hands of men (Haddad & Hoddinott 1994; Rubalcava, Teruel & Thomas 2004). This necessitates the current study and more so since majority of the sample comprises women. To further understand parental preferences in Imenti North County, an examination of parents demographic data was necessary to understand their types of power structures, and their believe system in relation to particularly educating children at pre-school level and in consequently in the other levels of education . To figure this out there was need to for this paper to find out and establish these parents marital status, religion, age, education level and child preference

Recent research provides an important insight that while the existing research has focused on understanding the role of parental background on skills and preferences that facilitate individual success (Flávio Cunha and Heckman 2007; Cunha et al.2006; Heckman 2006). Also a study by Michal, Julie & Barbara (2011), noted that while the existing research has



focused on understanding the role of parental background and on skills and preferences that facilitate individual success no work has focused on parental preferences and in particular in education for children in relation to school enrolments. This paper focuses on parental child's preference for education.

METHODS

This study was a descriptive study employing a survey method. The study was conducted in Imenti North County which was formerly called Meru central District. The District is approximately 1,141 square kilometres in size with 54,777 households with pre-school age children of 4-5 years. Imenti North District has a population of 243,220 pre-school age children of 4-5 years. The study targeted parents of pre-school age going children. According to the census report by Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of 1999, Miriga Mieru West Division of Imenti North County has got five locations identified and documented. These are Ntima with a population of 10,431 children of 4-5 years, Municipality with 27,349 children of 4-5 years, Igoki with 8,555 children, Ntankira with 19,554 and Nthimbiri with 12,312. The five locations of Miriga Mieru West Division of Imenti North District have a total population of 78,201 pre-school children aged 4-5 years. From the target population of parents with children of pre-school age a probability sample size of 390 parents was selected. The study utilized the questionnaire for parents in data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Parents' Marital Status

To establish the marital status of parents, they were asked to state whether they are single, married, divorced, separated or widowed. Out of the 390 parents who participated in the study in the five locations 288, (74%) of them were married, 44 (11%) were single, 32 (8%) of them were separated, 20 of them were widowed and less than one percent of these parents were divorced.

Parents' Religion

To establish the religion of parents, they were asked to tick their religion. Whether Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or specify any other religion. After this, it was evident that parents who participated in the study belonged to a certain religion of which majority 282 (72%) were Protestants, 85 parents (22%) were Catholics, Muslims and other religions accounted for 4%. Among these 15 parents were Muslims and 8 parents belonged to other religions.



Religion is important not only to parents but also to young children since it inculcates in them moral values such as right and wrong, it also develops a firm foundation of faith to be built upon as they get older. Religious practices can also determine child rearing practices.

Parents' Age

To establish the age of parents, they were asked to indicate the category that best explained their age. A large number of parents in the study 203 (52%) were between 25 – 34 years of age while only 13 parents (3%) were above the age of 55 years. Parents between the age brackets 35 – 44 years were 94 (24%), those between ages 18-24 years were 58 (15%) and ages 45 - 54 years were 22 (6%).

Parents' Education Level

To establish parents' levels of education, they were asked to state their highest level of education completed and their responses are indicated in table 1

Table 1: Parent's Level of Education by Location

Location

Parents Education Level	Igoki	Municipal	Ntankira	Nthimbiri	Ntima	Total
Primary Frequency	15	12	24	25	26	102
Percentages (%)	(19.2)	(15.4)	(30.8)	(32.1)	(33.3)	(26.1)
Secondary Frequency	22	17	13	19	18	89
Percentages (%)	(28.2)	(21.8)	(16.7)	(24.4)	(23.1)	(22.8)
Post sec/ College/ Professional training Frequency	16	10	4	11	4	45
Percentages (%)	(20.5)	(12.8)	(5.1)	(14.1)	(5.1)	(11.5)
University Frequency	3	1	1	1	0	6
Percentages (%)	(3.8)	(1.3)	(1.3)	(1.3)	(0.00)	(1.5)
No schooling Frequency	22	38	36	22	30	148
Percentages (%)	(28.2)	(48.7)	(46.1)	(28.2)	(38.4)	(37.9)
Total Frequency	78	78	78	78	78	390
Percentages (%)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)



Table 1 shows that 102 parents (26%) had a primary school education while only 6 parents (2%) had a university education. The study also found that 148 parents (38%) did not have an education at all. Among the 390 parents, 89 (23%) of them had a secondary education and only 45 parents (12%) had gone to colleges and other professional training institutions. Interestingly, Ntima and Ntankira locations had the least number of parents with post secondary education. In the five divisions the number of parents with post-secondary education decreased as indicated in table 1. It was necessary to establish the education level of parents since it has been strongly associated with health of children and also the importance attached to education. Research indicates that highly educated parents seek medical advice (Gering *et al.*, 2006).

PARENTS' CHILD PREFERENCE FOR EDUCATION

Parents were asked if they did not have enough money, which of the children they would prefer to educate between boys or girls. It came out that parents in Imenti North County, Kenya prefer to educate both boys and girls. Some parents 186 (48%) preferred to educate girls and 204 parents (52%) preferred to educate the boys. Some of the reasons given by parents for making their choice to educate the girls and not boys were that girls have more needs than boys, and are able to help themselves as well as others when educated. Parents also reported that girls are more merciful to them than boys, that girls are more development conscious and more responsible, they are less problematic and more vulnerable, these parents argued that boys get inheritance from parents or grandparents but girls can get married to a family with nothing and suffer more raising children and taking care of the family, but if she gets a good education, she can be a pillar to support her family comfortably. These parents also argued that boys can get many casual jobs to do than girls. Parents who supported girl education gave examples of what girls have done in their villages like constructing permanent houses for their parents, helping the needy children in the community and cited the fact that girls can now become national leaders and take powerful positions in government.

Parents who preferred educating boys than girls said that it is better to educate a boy because a girl can become pregnant and drop out of school hence the enormous resources put to her education ends up being wasted. The same parents argued that a boy needs education to be responsible since they are expected to marry and take good care of their



families. The opinions of parents who preferred educating girls and those who preferred educating boys strongly bring out the idea that both the boy-child and the girl-child need education to have a better future, get employed or start a business to help themselves and their families.

The views of these parents on child preference are consistent with those of participants in a study by Ncabira (2005) who found that parents in Meru Central County viewed educating boys to be more crucial given the ultimate roles as family heads and bread winners. They also believed that boys are more intelligent than the girls and that girls are less success-oriented than boys. Given the perceptions of parents in the two studies, it is not surprising to find girls who have dropped out of school due to family inability to meet their financial demands of schooling, or being used as a source of income for the household.

A study by David & Amy, (1974) on individual sessions with 150 preschool children aged two through four: they were asked to choose which parent (in the next room) they wanted to participate with them in each of seven play activities. The purpose was to investigate hypotheses about parent preference in a theory of sex-role and parental identification. Boys showed a strong father preference ($p < .01$). Girls showed no parent preference when age groups were combined whereas a father preference was significant ($p = .049$) in two-year-old girls, and a mother preference was significant ($p = .024$) in four-year-old girls, with three-year-old girls showing no significant preference. Just like this finding where by children view their fathers significantly, this paper recommends that fathers in Meru need to be more significantly involved in their young children's education and more importantly on making positive decisions to send both male and female children for education at pre-school level and also in other levels of education.

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