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## Factors Influencing School Drop Out Among High School Students in Kirinyaga County, Kenya

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### Abstract:

Education is an important life process that plays a vital role in forming the foundation for a student's future better being, as it equips learners with basic knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable him/her to cope well in life. This study examined the factors that lead to increased school dropout among high school students in Kirinyaga County, with the aim of suggesting the possible solutions thus promoting learner's retention among high schools. The objective of the study was to determine the factors leading to increased school dropout in Kirinyaga County. This study was undertaken in response to high school dropout rates and poor academic performance among the high school students in Kirinyaga County. In this study, questionnaires were used as data collecting instruments. Questionnaires were preferred because of their ability to ensure confidentiality to responses from respondents. A visit was done to 18 high schools, which are located in Kirinyaga, which will include both day and boarding. Questionnaires were issued randomly to ensure fairness. 18 principals and 108 teachers. The entire questionnaire was returned hence equivalent to 100%. Responses received from questionnaires was organized, tabulated and analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Data was analyzed by use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings were presented using frequency tables. This study established that low socio-economic status, poor school performance, drug and substance abuse, peer pressure among others contribute to student dropout. Poverty leading to financial problems was also cited as a cause of school dropout. The study recommends that the government should take stern measures against traders who employ children to pave way for these children to go to school. Similar studies should be done in the other counties so as to find a long lasting solution to the problem.

### Introduction:

School dropout is a major challenge especially in developing countries despite new programs, which aim at rectifying the situation. Even as the world prioritizes the accessibility and quality of education, global dropout's rates continue to increase. The latest edition of the global education reveals that Africa has the world's highest dropout rates. According to UNICEF & UNESCO, (2011), School dropout refers to children who were enrolled in school but have left school before completion. Dropping out of school is related to a variety of factors that can be grouped into categories, namely individual, family, school and community

factors. Dropping out of school also has negative consequences for earnings. Mawere (2012:12) defines drop outs as "those students who leave school before the final year of the educational cycle in which they are enrolled, which could be high school, ordinary or advanced level, or even college or university levels"(Mawere,2012:12). Despite the free education in the country, which accounted for an increase in enrollment, a sizable number of children still find themselves out of school, owing to a number of reasons. Some of which include the following; poverty, lack of sponsorship, broken homes and engagement of children as house helps, as the factor or clog in the wheel of children's access to education. Mwangi (2010) also indicated that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices continued to deny right to education. This study will focus on school factors though recognizing that there is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out. Dropping out of school is often the result of a long-term process of disengagement that may begin in some cases even before a child enters school, and is often described as a process, with factors building and compounding overtime. Education Policy and Data Centre (2009) has cited that several studies, carried out in the United States of America (USA) and in 35 developing countries primarily concerned with the identification of characteristics associated with dropping out. Most learners who drop out of school attribute their success or failure to ability. When students attribute failure to lack of ability, they are likely to give up leading to school dropout. Thus an individual who views failure as due to lack of ability will hold less hope for doing better in future. This is common among students from poor backgrounds who believe that they are not capable because they are poor leading to learned helplessness. Students who question their own ability pose a serious challenge since their history of failure and feelings of incompetence undercut motivation and learning leading to increased school dropout.

### **General Objective:**

The general objective guiding the study is to determine the factors leading to increased school dropout among the high school students in Kirinyaga County

### **Specific objectives:**

1. To establish the school factors which contribute to students dropping out of school
2. To determine what strategies exist in school for student's dropout prevention
3. To determine the available measures among the general population

### **Materials and Methods:**

**Study Design:** A quantitative study design was employed to investigate the factors leading to increased school dropout among high school students. This design was used to elicit the teachers and learners' reasons for school dropout in Kirinyaga County.

**Study population:** The study targeted all high schools both public and private high schools in order to ensure that the information obtained could be of great help by not excluding others.

**Study Setting:** The study was carried out in Kirinyaga County the former central province of Kenya. The place is known to have latitude of -0.5000 and a longitude of 37.3333. The total population in Kirinyaga County is 610,411 according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

**Sampling procedures:** The researcher obtained an approval letter from Kirinyaga University which was taken to the teachers. The selected schools were visited and the researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the teachers and principals. Stratified Simple random sampling was used as it gave every member an equal chance of being selected. The filled questionnaires were collected on appropriate day.

**Data collection:** A Questionnaire was used to collect the data. Questionnaires are preferred since large coverage of the population could be achieved with little time, personnel and cost. The questionnaire consisted closed and open ended questions that provided structured responses.

### **Validity and Reliability:**

Validity is the measure of quantity of being factual. The researcher established content validity by going through the research instruments by developing and revising them thoroughly.

### **Data collection procedure:**

The researcher was given permission from the management of the school to administer the questionnaires in the respective high schools. The researcher also paid a preliminary visit to the sampled high schools and explained the purpose of the study verbally and made the necessary arrangement for the actual administration of the questionnaires.

### **Data Analysis:**

Data were cleaned, organized, coded and entered into a computer for analysis using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The purpose of coding was to classify the responses into meaningful categories so as to bring out the essential patterns. Data were analyzed using quantitative methods. Frequency distributions and percentages was generated using descriptive statistic in order to examine the pattern of responses.

### **Ethical consideration:**

The approval to carry out this study was given by Kirinyaga University. The respondents were treated with respect and with confidence.

### **Results:**

The characteristics include age, gender, educational background and experience. Responses were got from principals and teachers from public secondary schools in Kirinyaga County. Out of the 108 teachers to whom questionnaires distributed, 106 were responded to and accepted for analysis representing a response rate of 98.15% that is statistically acceptable. For principals, all the questionnaires (100%) were responded to, thus very acceptable for statistical analysis.

### **Age Distribution of Respondents:**

The demographic attribute of age has importance through linkage with personal experiences. Age may influence attitudes and perceptions that can substantially be different across cohorts of age dissimilarity. Table 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents.

**Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents.**

Age	Principal		Teacher	
	F	%	F	%
20 – 30 Years	0	0	32	30.2
31 – 40 Years	4	22.2	50	47.2
41 – 50 Years	1	5.6	16	15.1
51 – 60 Years	13	72.2	8	7.5
Total	18	100	106	100

Table 1 shows that majority of the principals (72.2%) were aged between 51 and 60 years. From the table, 5.6% of the school heads were aged 41 to 50 years. Those aged between 31-40 years were 22.2% while there

was no one among the principals aged below 30 years. This finding demonstrates that young people are not fully represented in managerial and leadership functions. Majority of the teachers were (77.4%) were between 20 and 40 years.

### Gender distribution of respondents:

The study sought to establish how the sample was distributed by gender. The results of the respondents are presented in Table 2..

**Table 2: Gender distribution of the respondents:**

Gender	Principal		Teacher	
	F	%	F	%
Male	7	38.9	24	22.6
Female	11	61.1	82	77.4
Total	18	100	106	100

Findings from Table 2 indicate that there were slightly more female teachers and female principals than men. From the Table, 22.6% of the teachers were males while 77.4% were females. This finding indicates generally that the teaching profession seems to be more attractive to women in both teaching and management

### Distribution of respondents by experience:

The length of time spent in any institution leads to the development, understanding and experiences of the factors contributing to students' dropout. The study sought to establish the length of service of principals and teachers with the aim of establishing variances in factors contributing to dropout rates in secondary schools in Kirinyaga County. Table 3 below shows the findings.

**Table 3: Experience of the respondents:**

Experience	Principals		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 2 Years	2	11.1	64	60.4
3 – 4 years	8	44.4	26	24.5
5 – 6 Years	0	0	0	0
Over6 Years	8	44.4	16	15.1

From table 3, majority (55.5%) of the respondents had been principals for at least four years and below. However, a sizeable number (44.4%) of them had been heads of schools for 6 years. This depicts the experience that these heads had. Total experience and managerial experience in serving the school have a positive effect on heads' competency in managerial skills. It is argued that more experienced school heads lead their institutions much better as compared to their less experienced counterparts, consequently, better students' academic achievement. In this study, it was found that majority of the heads had inadequate experience (less than 4 years) and this could influence the academic performance of the students and consequently drop out from school.

### Socio -Economic Factors Influencing Students' Dropout:

Respondents were required to respond to given selected suggested socio-economic factors that were believed to contribute to dropout in high school schools. The information was analyzed by determining the mean on five items on a 5 – point Likert scale where: Strongly agree = 5; Agree= 4, Neutral = 3; Disagree =

2; Strongly disagree =1. However, the ranges of mean scores were interpreted as follows: Strongly agree = 4.2 – 5.0; Agree = 3.4 -4.2; Neutral = 2.6 -3.4; Disagree = 1.8 -2.6; Strongly Disagree 1.0 -1.8. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5 and 6.

**TABLE 5: Socio economic factors influencing students' dropout (Principals' responses)**

Socio-economic Factors	Level of agreement					M		
	SA	A	N	D	SD			
	F %	F %	F%	F%	F%			
Children from poor families drop out of school more than children who are from better off families.	7	38.91	055.61	5.6	00.0	00.0	4.33	
Children often drop out of school for wage labor in order to supplement the family income.	3	16.71	055.63	16.72	11.10	100.0	3.78	
The family size has an impact on high school dropout.	1	5.6	8	44.47	38.92	11.10	3.44	
Parent with high level of education send their children to school more than those with low education level.	1	055.66	33.31	5.6	15.6	00.0	4.39	
With the introduction of FPE, financial status of households does not influence students' dropout in public schools.	1	5.6	1	5.6	84.42	11.16	33.32	3.9
Though the user charges have been abolished in schools, there are other “hidden costs” hindering retention of students in schools.	9	50.07	38.90	00.0	211.10	100.0	4.28	

Findings in Table 5 show that majority of the principals strongly agreed that children from poor families drop out of school more than children who are from better off families (M=4.33), that parents with high levels of education send their children to school more than those with low education level (M=4.39) and that though the user charges have been abolished in schools, there are other "hidden costs" hindering retention of students in public secondary schools (M=4.28). These results imply that poverty, parents' education level and fee charges were among the major contributors to dropout in high school schools in Kirinyaga County. Today, growing up in a rural region in Kenya often means growing up without a decent education. Rural people are often caught in the vicious cycle of having no access to the services and opportunities that might lift them out of poverty – education, gainful employment, adequate nutrition, infrastructure and communications. Poverty is the source of poor health. Although some schools have a feeding program in place, only one meal is given which might be the only meal of the day for some learners. Therefore, it's just not sufficient to feed all children properly. Many families in Africa cannot afford two square meals, let alone sending their children to good schools where they will acquire good and qualitative education. Education for rural people lies at the heart of rural development and this is fundamental for reducing poverty worldwide. The school is the most important institution outside the family involved in socializing young people into all dimensions of adult roles and responsibilities. More years of schooling have been associated with many positive outcomes, including later ages of marriage, lower fertility, and healthier and better educated children. Therefore, education level of the parents plays a great role in shaping the education and the future of their children. The study findings also show that majority of the principals agreed that children often drop out of school for wage labor in order to supplement the family income (M=3.78) and that the family size had an impact on high school dropout (M=3.44). Children could get involved in child labor as a result of poverty in the area that makes the students to look for employment to meet their basic needs. Kirinyaga being a coffee growing area, child labor has been on the rise in coffee farms, eventually preventing children from attending school consistently. Due to their involvement in these farms, children would in some occasions leave school to go and pick coffee, thus further reducing their participation in educational activities. The table also shows that principals neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that with the introduction of FPE,

financial status of households does not influence students' dropout in schools ( $M=2.39$ ). This implies that the principals were not sure whether introduction of FPE and financial status of households influenced dropout. Similar findings were observed from the teachers as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Socio economic factors influencing students' dropout (Teachers' responses)**

Socio-economic Factors	Level of agreement					M					
	SA	A	N	D	SD						
	F %	F %	F %	F %	F %						
Children from poor families drop out of school more than children who are from better off families.	74	69.8	24	22.6	8 7.5	0 0.0	0 0.0	<b>4.62</b>			
Children often drop out of school for wage labor in order to Supplement the family income.	8	7.5	24	22.6	34	32.1	40	37.7	0 0.0	<b>3.00</b>	
The family sizes has an impact on school dropout.	32	30.2	40	37.7	18	17.0	16	15.1	0 0.0	<b>3.83</b>	
Parent with high level of education send their children to school more than those with low education level.	74	69.8	32	30.2	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	<b>4.70</b>		
With the introduction of FPE, financial Statu of Households does not influence students’ dropout in schools.	0	0.0	24	22.6	16	15.1	48	45.3	18	17.2	<b>2.43</b>
Though the user charges have been abolished in schools, there are other “hidden costs” hindering retention of student’s in Schools.	18	17.0	80	75.5	0 0.0	0 0.0	8 7.5	<b>3.94</b>			

Findings in Table 6 show that majority of the teachers strongly agreed that children from poor families drop out of school more than children who are from better off families ( $M=4.62$ ), that parents with high level of education send their children to school more than those with low education level ( $M=4.70$ ) These results imply that poverty, parents' education level were among the major contributors to dropout in high schools in Kirinyaga County. The study findings also show that majority of the teachers agreed that though the user charges have been abolished in schools, there are other "hidden costs" hindering retention of schools ( $M=3.94$ ) and that the family size had an impact on high school dropout ( $M=3.84$ ). the table also shows that teachers were not very sure that children often drop out of school for wage labor in order to supplement the family income ( $M=3.00$ ). Therefore, teachers neither agreed nor disagreed that children often drop out of school for wage labor in order to supplement the family income. The table also shows that teachers disagreed with the statement that with the introduction of FPE, financial status of households does not influence students' dropout in schools ( $M=2.43$ ). This implies that the teachers were categorical that introduction of FPE and financial status of households did not influence dropout. The respondents were further requested to give other socio-economic factors that could influence dropout in schools in Kirinyaga County. Table 7 presents the findings.

**Table 7: Other Socio Economic Factors Influencing Students' Dropout (Principals' Responses)**

Other socio-economic factors	Frequency	Percentage
Unstable family backgrounds	13	72.22
Death of one or both parents	8	44.44
Irresponsible parents	14	77.78
Poverty	16	88.89
Cultural Rituals	10	55.56
Drug and substance abuse	9	50

From Table 7, principals (88.89%) felt that poverty was a factor contributing to students drop-out from schools. Cultural practices like early marriages and passage of rites (both male and female circumcision)

contributed also to dropout as indicated by 55.56% of the principals. Cultural practices like early marriage inevitably denies children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future wellbeing of their families and society. Indeed, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so. The purpose of the rights to education and to health is that they facilitate and ensure the effective enjoyment of other human rights. For a number of poorer families, the potential rewards of educating daughters are too far off and, therefore, their education is not recognized as an investment. Families perceive that a girl's education will only benefit her husband's household, and not her parents. Additionally, some parents believe that girls do not need an education for their roles as wives and mothers, that education undermines cultural practices, and it teaches the girl to reject tradition. Some schools often have a policy of refusing to allow married or pregnant girls or girls with babies to return to school. They may believe that it will set a bad example to other students or that other parents will be angry to see the school go against the traditional beliefs. Even if they do permit girls to return, the school environment - rules, school routine, time table and physical conditions – can make it too difficult for a girl to attend school and perform her duties as wife and mother at the same time. Bullying and abuse by students and other parents can further reduce girls' self-confidence and sense of security, forcing them to give up on schooling. When girls drop out of school to get married, there is a knock-on effect for the community as a whole, and for future generations. Studies suggests that children of young, uneducated mothers are less likely to have a good start to their education, do well in class or continue beyond the minimum schooling. Their daughters especially are likely to dropout, marry young and begin the cycle again (Ingrid, 2009) The study findings reveal that 44.44% of the principals felt that death of one or both parents has contributed to a greater extent to dropout from schools. When parents die, the children themselves take on responsibilities for the survival of the family and home. In economically disadvantaged communities, a child's contribution is often necessary for the survival of the household. Death of parents may not simply increase the amount of work that the children do but may also assume decision-making and responsibilities that transform roles within families and households. Children assume adult roles as heads of household because there are no alternatives. They take charge of the care and running of the home for themselves and their siblings. They work long hours doing household tasks, supervising younger children and engaging in income-generating work in order to support the family. Many quit school and jeopardize their own health and developmental needs to take on roles as parent and provider (Miriam, 2000). From the Table, 77.78% of the principals felt that student's dropout was as a result of irresponsible parents. Some parents have been accused of lack of support in provision of resources for learning for their children and lack of co-operation in matters regarding their children education. In Kenya in the past, financial constraints have often discouraged many poor parents from sending some or all of their children to school. Often these parents keep their children gainfully employed to supplement the family income, or keep them at home to look after their younger siblings while both parents are away at work in the fields or elsewhere. Drug abuse was another factor cited by the principals that contributed to students' dropout. Since drugs like miraa, local brews, alcohol are readily available in the area, 50% of the principals associated this with drug abuse among students, which was cited as another factor contributing to dropout. This together with children involvement in the picking of coffee, which reduced time for studies, consequently increases chances of children absconding school. According to Monti *et al* (2005), substance use itself may impair cognitive development which, in turn, reduces academic achievement and disrupts academic progression. Monti *et al* (2005) argues that heavy adolescent substance use can lead to problems with working memory and attention due to changes in adolescent brain activity. In turn, these memory and attention problems may lead to decreases in academic performance and engagement in school, and ultimately increase risk for school problems and dropout. Principals 72.22% felt that unstable

family backgrounds contribute to dropout among students. Theoretically, the family is a source of security for all members who belong to that family unit. It is the site of social reproduction as children are born and are socialized within the family. The family provides the individual with a safety net and a buffer against outside pressures. The family provides the individual with a sense of security. When the family for any reason stops functioning then the individuals who belong to that particular family unit become generally insecure. One of the common factors that can help to explain why some children from poor families end up dropping out of school was family breakdown or violence within the family. In some cases of violence within the home, especially in cases where the parents fight all the time, some children might prefer to stay at home to monitor the situation and protect one parent from the other parent.

### School Based Factors Influencing Students' Dropout:

Respondents were required to respond to given selected suggested school based factors that were believed to contribute to dropouts in high school schools. The information was analyzed by determining the mean on five items on a 5 – point Likert scale where: Very great extent = 5; Great extent = 4, Moderate extent = 3; Low extent = 2; Not at all =1. However, the ranges of mean scores were interpreted as follows: Very great extent = 4.2 – 5.0; Great extent = 3.4-.4.2; Moderate extent = 2.6 -3.4; Low extent = 1.8 -2.6; Not at all 1.0 – 1.8. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 8.

**TABLE 8: School based factors influencing students' dropout (Principal's responses)**

School Based Factors	Level of agreement										M
	VGE		GE		ME		LE		NAA		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
School punishment	0	0.0	3	16.7	5	27.8	3	16.7	7	38.9	2.22
Class repetition	0	0.0	6	33.3	6	33.3	4	22.2	2	11.1	2.89
Quality of education	0	0.0	5	27.8	4	22.2	2	11.1	7	38.9	2.39
Shortage of teachers	5	27.5	3	16.7	2	11.1	3	16.7	5	27.8	3.00
Inadequate physical facilities	6	33.3	1	5.6	4	22.2	4	22.2	3	16.7	3.17
Inadequate teaching and learning resources	0	0.0	7	38.9	2	11.1	3	16.7	6	33.3	2.56
Poor sanitation	0	0.0	4	22.2	4	22.2	6	33.3	4	22.2	2.44
Negative attitude of teachers	0	0.0	8	44.4	3	16.7	4	22.2	3	16.7	2.89

Findings in Table 8 reveal that majority of the principals indicated that class repetition influenced dropout to moderate extent (M=2.89), that shortage of teachers influenced dropout to a moderate extent (M=3.00), that inadequate physical facilities such as classrooms influenced dropout to moderate extent (M=3.17) and that negative attitude of teachers influenced dropout to moderate extent (M=2.89). An additional requisite for meaningful teaching and learning to happen is infrastructure and teaching learning materials. Availability of physical facilities such as classrooms, toilets, desks, water tanks and food is important in retaining children



at school and therefore in the case that these facilities are not adequately provided then students can drop out of school. Hygienic conditions need to be maintained in schools for proper learning to occur. There is a critical shortage of learning materials, which constrains offering quality education and this can contribute to dropout. From the table, majority of the principals were of the opinion that school punishment (M=2.22), quality of education (M=2.39), inadequate teaching and learning resources (M=2.56) and poor sanitation (M=2.44) all contributed to low extent to the students' dropout in Kirinyaga County. Teachers gave similar responses as shown in table 9.

**Table 9: School based factors influencing students' dropout (Teachers' responses):**

School Based Factors	Level of agreement										M
	VGE		GE		ME		LE		NAA		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
School punishment	0	0.0	8	7.5	34	32.1	40	37.7	24	22.6	2.25
Class repetition	30	30.2	24	22.6	0	0.0	34	32.1	16	15.1	3.11
Quality of education	0	0.0	8	7.5	8	7.5	34	32.1	56	52.8	1.70
Shortage of teachers	8	7.5	26	24.5	0	0.0	32	30.2	40	37.7	2.34
Inadequate physical facilities	26	24.5	24	22.6	8	7.5	16	15.1	32	30.2	2.96
Inadequate teaching and learning resources	0	0.0	8	7.5	18	17.0	32	30.2	48	45.3	1.87
Poor sanitation	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	7.5	58	54.7	40	37.7	1.70
Negative attitude of teachers	0	0.0	26	24.5	16	15.1	40	37.7	24	22.6	2.42

Findings in Table 9 reveal that majority of the teachers indicated that class repetition influenced dropout to moderate extent (M=3.11) and that inadequate physical facilities such as classrooms influenced dropout to moderate extent (M=2.96). An additional requisite for meaningful teaching and learning to happen is infrastructure and teaching learning materials. Availability of physical facilities such as classrooms, toilets, desks, water tanks and food is important in retaining children in school and therefore, in the case that these facilities are not adequately provided then students can drop out of school. Hygienic conditions need to be maintained in schools for proper learning to occur. There is a critical shortage of learning materials, which constrains offering quality education and this can contribute to dropout. From the table, majority of the teachers were of the opinion that school punishment (M=2.25), shortage of teachers (M=2.34), negative attitude of teachers (M=2.42) all contributed to low extent to the students' dropout in Kirinyaga County. Teachers disagreed that inadequate teaching and learning resources influenced dropout. The results further show that quality of education (M=1.7), poor sanitation (M=1.7) did not at all influence dropout in the sub county.

#### **Students Characteristics influencing dropout:**

Respondents were required to respond to given students characteristics that were believed to contribute to dropouts in schools. The information was analyzed by determining the mean on five items on a 5 – point Likert scale where: Very great extent = 5; Great extent = 4, Moderate extent = 3; Low extent = 2; Not at all =1. However, the ranges of mean scores were interpreted as follows: Very great extent = 4.2 – 5.0; Great

extent = 3.4 -.4.2; Moderate extent= 2.6 -3.4; Low extent = 1.8 -2.6; Not at all 1.0 – 1.8. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10: Student characteristics influencing dropout (Principals' responses)**

Students characteristics	Level of agreement										M
	VGE		GE		ME		LE		NAA		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Indiscipline	4	22.2	7	38.9	2	11.1	4	22.2	1	5.6	3.5
Teenage pregnancies	0	0	0	0	5	27.8	10	55.6	3	16.7	2.11
Poor academic performance	0	0	5	27.8	7	38.9	4	22.2	2	11.1	2.83
Drug abuse	9	50	3	16.7	1	5.6	2	11.1	3	16.7	3.72
Distance from school	0	0	7	38.9	5	27.8	2	11.1	4	22.2	2.83

According to Table 11, majority of the principals indicated that indiscipline contributed to student's dropout to a great extent (M=3.5) and that drug abuse contributed to school dropout to a great extent (M=3.72). The table also shows that poor academic performance (M=2.83) and distance from school (M=2.83) influenced dropout to a moderate extent. Teenage pregnancies influenced student dropout to a low extent (M=2.11). Similar findings were obtained from the teachers as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11: Student characteristics influencing dropout (Teachers' responses)**

Student characteristics	Level of agreement										M
	VGE		GE		ME		LE		NAA		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Indiscipline	40	37.7	34	32.1	8	7.5	8	7.5	16	15.1	3.70
Teenage pregnancies	0	0	24	22.6	40	37.7	26	24.5	16	15.1	2.68
Poor academic performance	0	0	24	22.6	58	54.7	16	15.1	8	7.5	2.92
Drug abuse	8	7.5	26	24.5	24	22.6	16	15.1	8	7.5	2.42
Distance from school	34	32.1	8	7.5	16	15.1	24	22.6	24	22.6	3.04

According to Table 11, majority of the teachers indicated that indiscipline contributed to student's dropout to a great extent (M=3.70), that distance from school (M=3.04) contributed to a moderate extent to dropout, that poor academic performance (M=2.92) contributed to a moderate extent to students' dropout and that teenage pregnancies influenced dropout to a moderate extent (M=2.68). The table also shows that drug abuse influenced students drop out to a low extent (M=2.42). Principals provided other student characteristics that could influence dropout. Table 12 summarizes the findings.

**Table 12: Other characteristics influencing students' dropout (Principals' responses)**

Student characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Peer influence	16	88.89
Parents abdicating their responsibilities	13	72.22
Lack of motivation	10	55.56
Personal choice	3	16.67
Student's self-esteem	7	38.89

Findings in Table 12 summarize other factors that were cited by the principals that could influence student dropout. Majority of the principals (88.89%) felt that peer influence and parents abdicating their responsibilities (72.22%) were among the major contributing student characteristics to students' dropout. Others included lack of motivation (55.56%), students' self-esteem (38.89%) and personal choice (16.67%). Once learners are enrolled in high school, they interact with each other and form peer groups which may sometimes spurs adolescents to be misguided out of normal expectations by their families, school and society due to their difference in peer pressure control, which could eventually contribute to school dropout. Moreover, adolescents tend to perceive their future in concordance with their peers and as a result, young adults who surrounds themselves with friends who place low or no value on pursuing education may forgo schooling.

## **Discussion:**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of students' dropout in schools in Kirinyaga County. The study addressed socio-economic factors, school based factors and student characteristics as the causes of school dropout.

### 5.2.1 Social-Economic Factors

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that children from poor families drop out of school more than children who are from better off families ( $M=4.33$ ), that parents with high level of education send their children to school more than those with low education level ( $M=4.39$ ) and that though the user charges have been abolished in schools, there are other hidden costs hindering retention of students in schools ( $M=4.28$ ). These results imply that poverty, parents' education level and fee charges were among the major contributors to dropout in high schools in Kirinyaga County. The study findings also show that majority of the principals agreed that children often drop out of school for wage labor in order to supplement the family income ( $M=3.78$ ) and that the family size had an impact on school dropout ( $M=3.44$ ). Principals (88.89%) felt that poverty was a factor contributing to school drop-out. Lack of community and parental support was cited as a factor contributing to dropout among students. In general, students in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods are more likely to drop out of school than students in more affluent neighbourhoods. There were several cultural factors affecting dropout. In this study culture therefore downplayed the role of a girl child in the family, denying her an opportunity to receive education and contribute to the economic development of her community. The girls' enrolment in school at lower classes is very high, but they drop out in large numbers in upper classes because at this stage, they have attained the age when they ought to undergo the cultural rite of passage leading to womanhood. They are therefore forcibly withdrawn from school or they fall out on their own volition on account of the informal teaching they received on the value of being circumcised. There were also cases of students dropping out of schools due to early marriage. Kakuru (2003), Kasente (2004) explain how early marriages influence children's dropping out of school especially as regards the girl child as it is perceived by parents that marrying off the girl is an escape route from poverty. Study findings suggested that parents' education level was among the major contributors to dropout in schools in Kirinyaga County. Findings with regard to the impact of parents' education on schooling of children from other studies show that the children of more educated parents are more likely to progress further through school. Holmes (2003) showed that this impact differs by gender, the education of the father increases the expected level of school retention of boys, and that of the mother's enhances attainment of girls. Similarly other studies by Behman et al, (1999) cited by Swada and Lokshin (2001) reported a consistently positive and significant coefficient of father's and mother's education at all levels of education. Principals indicated that class repetition influenced dropout to moderate extent ( $M=2.89$ ), that shortage of teachers influenced dropout to a moderate extent ( $M=3.00$ ), that inadequate physical facilities such as classrooms influenced dropout to moderate extent ( $M=3.17$ ) and that negative attitude of teachers influenced dropout to moderate extent ( $M=2.89$ ). Majority of the principals

were of the opinion that school punishment ( $M=2.22$ ), quality of education ( $M=2.39$ ), inadequate teaching and learning resources ( $M=2.56$ ) and poor sanitation ( $M=2.44$ ) all contributed to low extent to the students' dropout in County. An additional requisite for meaningful teaching and learning to happen is infrastructure and teaching learning materials. Availability of physical facilities such as classrooms, toilets, desks, water tanks and food is important in retaining children at school and therefore in the case that these facilities are not adequately provided then students can drop out of school. Hygienic conditions need to be maintained in schools for proper learning to occur. There is a critical shortage of learning materials, which constrains offering quality education and this can contribute to dropout. Teachers gave similar responses. Majority of the principals indicated that indiscipline contributed to student's dropout to a great extent ( $M=3.5$ ) and that drug abuse contributed school dropout to a great extent ( $M=3.72$ ). Poor academic performance ( $M=2.83$ ) and distance from school ( $M=2.83$ ) influenced dropout to a moderate extent. Teenage pregnancies influenced student dropout to a low extent ( $M=2.11$ ). Majority of the principals (89.89) felt that peer influence and parents abdicating their responsibilities (72.22%) were among the major contributing student characteristics to student dropout. Others included lack of motivation (55.56%), students' self-esteem (38.89%) and personal choice (16.67%).

Cultural practices like early marriages and passage of rites (male circumcision) contributed also to dropout as indicated by 55.56% of the principals. The study findings reveal that 44.44% of the principals felt that death of one or both parents had contributed to a greater extent to dropout from schools. Majority (77.78%) of the principals felt that student's dropout was as a result of irresponsible parents. Drug abuse was another factor cited by the principals that contributed to students' dropout. Principals (72.22%) felt that unstable family backgrounds contribute to dropout among students. School heads indicated that peer pressure and motivation to continue with education were the student factors that affected dropout. These findings are similar to findings by Dekkers and Eccles (1996) who studied the way students value education and how this affected their progression in education. Their results showed that students were motivated in their education by their expectation of the benefits based on their perception of what had actually happened in the past and by their experience of how education had benefited elder family members and significant others in their environment.

According to Wrigley (1995), once learners are enrolled in high school, they interact with each other and form peer groups which may sometimes spurs adolescents to be misguided out of normal expectations by their families, school and society due to their difference in peer pressure control which could eventually result in students dropping out of school. Moreover, students tend to perceive their future in concordance with their peers and as a result, children who are surrounded by friends who place low or no value on pursuing education may also forgot attending school or at least delay to transit (Tomkiewicz and Bushnik, 2003).

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, high school education is a worthy initiative as it forms the basis of education despite the challenge of dropout. Students often dropout of school forage labor in order to supplement the family income ( $M=3.78$ ) and that family size had an impact on high school dropout ( $M=3.44$ ). Class repetition influenced dropout to moderate extent ( $M=3.11$ ) and that inadequate physical facilities influence dropout moderate extend ( $M=2.96$ ). Lastly, indiscipline contributes to dropout to great extent ( $M=3.5$ ) and poor academic performance ( $M=2.92$ ) contributed to moderate extent to students' dropout. Majority of the principals felt that peer influence was the major contributing factor to students' dropout.

### **Recommendation:**

The government should introduce feeding program to all high schools. The study established that some children come from poor backgrounds and could not afford the basic needs (food and clothing) for their children. Stern measures must be taken against people who employ children. The government should allocate more funds and resources to high schools to ensure that free high school education runs smoothly without compromising the quality of education.

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