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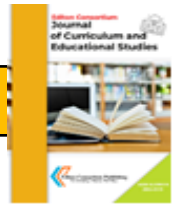

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Relationship between Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation and Girls' Completion of Secondary Education in Narok West Sub-County, Narok County

Mouline Otieno [(1)]
Betty Jeruto Tikoko [(2)]
Henry Kiptiony Kiplangat [(3)]

(1.2.3) Kabarak University, Kenya.
Main author's email: moulineotieno1@gmail.com

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub- County, Narok County, occasioned by challenges related to the completion of girls in secondary education. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains one of the major barriers to girls' educational attainment. As a result, the Kenyan government passed legislation to prohibit the practice, but little research has been conducted to establish the legislation's effectiveness in improving girls' educational outcomes. The paper is anchored on Adam's Equity Theory, which supports the study by explaining the psychological and social motivation behind girls' persistence in school. The descriptive correlational design was employed. The target population was 3000 female students and 658 teachers in the 7 girls' secondary schools in Narok West Sub-County. Census sampling was used to select all the 7 girls' secondary schools in Narok West Sub-County to participate in the study. Simple random sampling was then used to calculate a sample of 1078 students and 182 teachers. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. The instruments' reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha and the test-retest method. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Correlation analysis. The results indicated a positive relationship (r=.019) between the prohibition of FGM and girls' completion of secondary school. Further analysis showed a statistically insignificant relationship between the two constructs (p=.858). The findings of the study are useful for guiding the strengthening of the law's implementation by government officials and by school administrators, and for raising awareness of the law among the school community, in order to increase completion rates for girls in secondary education.

Key words: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Government Interventions, Narok West Sub-County, Secondary Education, Secondary School Completion.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the importance attached to education for girls, there are still challenges in girls' education outcomes, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where patriarchal systems are a barrier to education. In particular, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains a leading cause of school drop-out as it is seen as necessary for early marriage (World Bank, 2022). In Kenya, UNICEF (2020) noted that although the prevalence of FGM has declined, there are areas where the practice is still prevalent, and Narok County is one of these areas.

To combat this, the Kenyan government enacted legislation to curb retrogressive cultural practices that hinder girls' participation in education. The Children Act No. 29 of 2022clearly prohibits all forms of harmful cultural practices, including FGM, reinforcing the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2011). Although these laws have been useful in reducing the practice of FGM, the effectiveness in ensuring girls stay in school through to completion remains unknown. In Narok County, girls' transition to completion of secondary school remains a challenge due to the lingering social pressure of FGM and subsequent early domestic responsibilities (MoE, 2021). However, little empirical evidence has been gathered to support this view.

While the laws to prohibit FGM are in place, it is not clear how they affect completion rates of girls in secondary education. In fact, it remains unclear whether the law is being enforced effectively enough to ensure the completion of schooling for girls at all levels. In addition, few studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of government legislation in improving education outcomes for girls in secondary school. Nkatha et al. (2025), for instance, did a study titled Assessing how Dropping-Out of School due to FGM Influences Girls' Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Narok South Sub-County, Narok County and reported that even with a national 100 per cent transition policy, the transition rate from primary to secondary school for girls in Narok was low as FGM remains a primary driver for school dropouts in Narok South. However, this study was not focused on the effectiveness of the prohibition of FGM law on the completion of girls in secondary school. Similarly, Mutundu et al. (2024), in their study titled "Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision and Transition of Girls in Education - Kajiado and Narok Counties," found that while girls' enrolment rates in secondary schools start at around 40 percent in Form 1, they drop to 10 percent by Form 4 in high-prevalence regions of Narok due to poor attitudes toward schooling among girls who had undergone FGM. However, this study did not focus on the effectiveness of the law prohibiting FGM specifically on the transition and completion of secondary schooling among girls in Narok West SubCounty. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct this study to establish the relationship between the prohibition of FGM and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County, with the specific objective of finding out the relationship between the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation and girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County. The hypothesis (Ho1) states that the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation has no statistically significant relationship with girls' completion of secondary education in Narok West Sub-County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Girls' Completion of Secondary School Education

Globally, education is viewed as a fundamental right of every child. According to UNESCO (2023), education enables people to make reasoned choices and seize opportunities when they occur, alleviates poverty and gives people a stronger voice in their respective societies. Education for girls, in particular, is of utmost importance for a nation, considering the social and economic benefits it brings. One of the most widely used dichotomous measures in education research and practice is girls' educational attainment. Completion of secondary school education for girls is a key marker of progress towards gender equality, economic development and improved health outcomes.

Martin et al. (2025) noted that while there has been almost universal progress in getting children into primary school, problems at the secondary level persist in low- and middle-income countries. Poverty and existing gender norms, early marriage, poor school infrastructure and parental preferences for boys' education are key barriers. Nonetheless, evidence indicates that appropriate policies can significantly increase girls' retention and completion rates (Niyonshuti et al., 2025). According to UNESCO (2024), in the 25 years since the Beijing Declaration on women's rights, substantial progress has been made in the number of girls completing school, but there is still a way to go to achieve gender parity for the

world's poorest girls. These girls are often found in less developed nations such as Kenya.

According to research by KNBS and ICF (2023) and Amenyah et al. (2024), the secondary school completion rate among Kenyan students remains below 100 per cent, which is a major concern in the Kenyan Education system. Additionally, UNESCO (2024) asserts that in some regions, such as Western and Central Africa, fewer than 50 per cent of girls complete primary school, and fewer than 12 per cent complete lower secondary school. The socio-economic and cultural structures in the Narok West Sub-County create multiple challenges to girls' secondary education. The APA News (2022) validated that the main barriers which hamper adolescent girls from continuing their education are poverty, domestic chores, GBV, child marriage, early pregnancy, and inadequate menstrual hygiene management. In Narok West, these global barriers manifest locally, with extreme poverty often leading pastoralist households to prioritise the education of sons over daughters. The local situation is greatly attributed to the lack of menstrual hygiene products. Particularly, in Narok. The Education News Kenya, 2025, also reported that a high percentage of girls in rural day schools miss classes each month because they have no sanitary products. As a result, it leads to increased absenteeism and eventual dropout.

The situation in Narok is no different from the global picture regarding girls' education. As Sage (2022) puts it, only one in five countries includes reviews of policies designed specifically to address the unique barriers to girls' access to secondary education. However, the lack of localised initiatives, such as rescue centres and deliberate enforcement of anti-FGM legislation, means that the specific cultural lag of pastoralist regions is not captured by administrative managers (24th Annual Supplement (Legal Notice 221 of 2023) , 2022). This shows that if the government does not enforce the laws and implement gender-responsive policies based on the local contexts, completion of secondary education will remain a pipedream for the girl child in Narok.

Secondary-level completion has been justified in many countries worldwide. Among the reasons cited is the need to reduce poverty, promote social and economic equity, and direct the benefits of secondary schooling. While acknowledging that there exists a problem of completion of girls in secondary school education, Amenya et al. (2024) and KNBS and ICF (2023) noted that the failure to ensure that girls are retained in Secondary Schools has led to a big loss in the country's budget for education, especially when the education opportunities are expected to increase for the female gender in Kenya. Allowing teenage girls to remain in school is therefore instrumental in advancing women's economic independence, agency, and overall empowerment (Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021).

UNICEF (2024) further asserted that secondary schooling yields higher economic returns for girls and women, expands their options, and facilitates their participation in civic life and overall decision-making. The social benefits of girls accessing education in developing countries are significant. The gains are reflected in lower female fertility rates, better nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers and infants, reduced infant mortality, and reduced early child marriage, among others. Benefits are further seen in the agricultural sector, as more productive farming methods are attributable to increased female schooling and to general civic participation, as women gain confidence and demand participation in the political process (UNICEF (2024a); KNBS & ICF (2023). Secondary education has a significant role in reducing early marriage and pregnancy (Psaki et al., 2022). Both of which are known to be harmful to girls' and children's health.

According to UNICEF (2024b), many factors have contributed to low retention rates among female learners in schools. In almost all developing countries, school dropout and retention rates have long been a subject of interest to academics, researchers, and policymakers. Olenja et al. (2020) reported that relatively few girls progress up the academic ladder, resulting in low retention. He outlined such bottlenecks that impede girls' academic progress as 'regressive practices' which demean women in social life; poor economic background and low family income, placing priority on boys in total disregard of their female counterparts.

A lot of research has been done on policies and interventions to increase girls' completion rates at all levels of education. Removing fees, cash and stipend awards has been found useful. For instance, Ghana's universal free secondary policy raised the overall completion rate by 15 percentage points. It increased by 14 points for girls in high-uptake districts. The policy's effect shows that the absorption of costs is a powerful incentive (Stenzel et al., 2024). In Rwanda, perceived

gender equity (safe climate, support) explained 22 per cent of variation in girls' completion (Niyonshuti et al., 2025).

A conditional cash program in Punjab, Pakistan, increased girls' probability of completing secondary school by 1.9 percentage points per potential year of exposure and reduced early marriage and early childbirth (Musaddiq & Said, 2023). Psaki et al. (2022) add that effective interventions address tuition/fees, food support, and academic support; promising ones improve school access, materials, and water/sanitation. BrudevoldNewman (2021) found that, In Kenya, a national policy that cut secondary fees and expanded public school places increased female educational attainment and delayed childbirth, particularly in areas with low initial transition rates to secondary education. However, none of these studies has investigated the effect of specific government interventions, such as anti-FGM legislation, on the completion of girls in secondary education in Kenya. This is the gap that this study intends to fill.

Prohibition of FGM and Girls' Completion of Secondary Education

Chematui et al. (2019) define Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision as a diverse range of practices (types I to IV) that can include varying degrees of cutting and removal of portions of the external genitalia, as well as suturing the labia. It is widely practised across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The increase in migration has increased the number of girls and women living in the diaspora. Areas that have undergone the practice include Australia, Europe, New Zealand, and North America (WHO, 2024; UNICEF, 2024c). Due to the psychological and medical negative effects of the practice, most countries have put in place legislation to control the practice.

Most African countries prohibit FGM/C. In Egypt, on August 31, 2016, the Egyptian People's Assembly approved the amendment to Article 242 of the Penal Code. Article 242 (bis) illegalises the act of female genital mutilation (FGM). Under the new amendment, if one commits this crime, they will be punished with a term of 5-7 years. In Nigeria, the practice of FGM/C is addressed through the National Policy and Plan of Action for Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria 2013–2017, as well as the National Gender Policy of 2006, National Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescent and Young People of 2007, and the National Reproductive Health Policy of 2017 (Kimani et al., 2020).

In Kenya, the government made laws to protect girls from harmful practices, FGM/C included. These include the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which protects children from harmful cultural practices, and the Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2011, which prohibits the practice. This law provides the framework for public engagement and advocacy for accelerating the eradication of FGM. The Children's Act 2001, S (14), criminalises subjecting a child to harmful cultural practices. This provision of the statute subjects the parents to ensuring the child's safety and security. The Penal Code, Cap 63, also provides offences under which the circumcisers can be charged.

The effectiveness of the laws in curbing the practice has been investigated by scholars worldwide. Hassan et al. (2023) did a study titled Call for Change Enhancement Upper Egyptian Females' Knowledge Regarding Effect of Female Genital Mutilation and established that most females know that FGM/C practice is illegal and know that the government tries to reduce FGM/C practice. However, the study did not establish the policy's effectiveness regarding education in Egypt. In Nigeria, Adeyemi Oluwadamilare and Babajide (2022) wondered why FGM/C remained prevalent and concluded that the issue is not a lack of extant laws on the subject. Rather, the issue is anchored around the lack of effective enforcement and efficient monitoring mechanisms. Again, the study did not relate the findings to education variables. In Tanzania, the failure of the Tanzanian government to ratify into law the East African Community prohibition of FGM bill (2016) frustrates efforts to coordinate and catalyse the end of FGM (Walela, 2020). From the foregoing, it is clear that despite laws prohibiting FGM in African countries, the practice continues. This study aims to establish why these failures of the law persist and how they relate to the completion of girls' secondary education in Narok West sub-county, Kenya.

The impacts of FGM, especially in Kenya, have been negatively felt in terms of the education of the girl child. Mutundu et al (2024) reported that in the counties with high FGM/C (Kajiado and Narok), only 40 per cent of girls join Form 1, and the number dropped to 10 per cent by Form 4. Negative attitudes to school and poor teacher

relations decrease transition and retention due to FGM/Crelated identity changes. Researchers have explored the impacts of FGM/C on education with several outputs. Mubaiwa and Chilo (2025) explored the phenomenon of FGM/C in Garissa and Isiolo counties, where Somali and Borana people are found.

Nonetheless, geographic discrepancy was observed in the sense that Garissa/Isiolo were different ethnic groups (Somali/Borana vs Maasai in Narok) and different cultural activities in relation to FGM. The results might not be directly applicable to Maasai settings. Although the literature confirms relationships between the prevalence of FGM/C and access to education among Maasai communities (Mutundu et al., 2024) and studies the sociocultural obstacles in the neighbouring areas (Wakhisi, 2025; Mubaiwa & Chilo, 2025), there is no research that has isolated the impact of FGM/C legislation on girls' completion of secondary school. Specifically, there are research gaps regarding the differences between primary-secondary transition, which is widely researched, and secondary completion, which has received little research under conditions of FGM prohibition. Moreover, within-county differences between Narok South (pastoralist/conservative) and Narok West (agro-pastoralist/transitional have also not been established.

Theoretical Framework

The paper was based on Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), which explains people's perceptions of their effort relative to what they receive in return. Particularly, people monitor whether they think their situation is fair. Equity theory focuses on two sides: the input and the outcome. Based on the theory, a school girl compares her inputs to an outcome ratio. If the girl child perceives inequality, she will act to correct the inequity. The girl child may lower her concentration on her studies. Inequities can often lead to increased absenteeism and even school dropout. Government interventions (e.g., a ban on FGM) in education can be applied as inputs into the theory. It is expected that the output, in terms of girls' school completion, will be seen as a fair outcome of the input if completion is enhanced. Hence, educationists need to take equity theory into account when examining completion rates, as it can explain whether girls are motivated to complete school, given the outputs of schooling relative to its inputs (government policies).

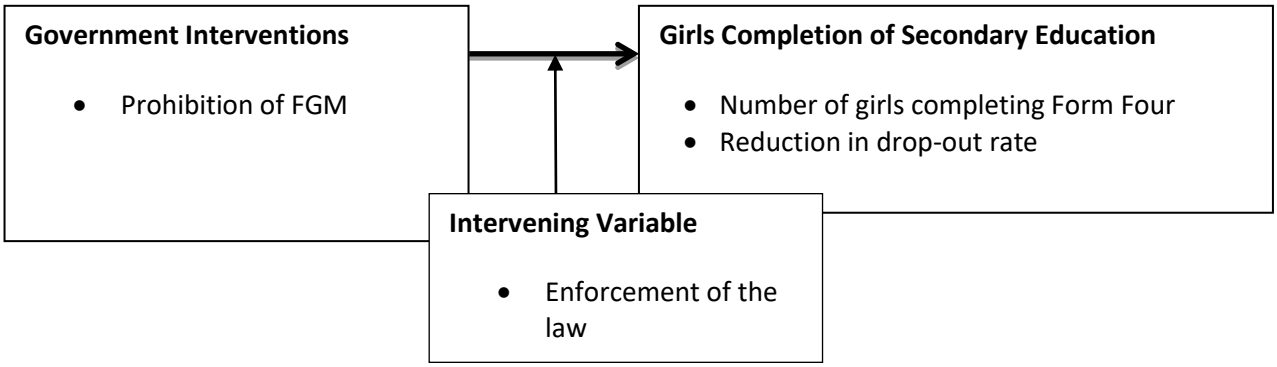

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the interaction of the dependent and independent variables. The independent variable was the prohibition of FGM, while girls' completion of secondary education was the dependent variable. While the law prohibiting FGM directly results in completion rates of girls in secondary school, the circumstances may be moderated by the enforcement of the law and poverty, which may reduce the effectiveness of the law. As a result, girls may drop out of school before graduation. The number of girls who complete Form Four may be less than those who enrolled in Form One, hence defeating the purpose for which the law was enacted.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive correlational research design was employed to investigate the relationship between the prohibition of FGM and girls' completion of secondary education. The correlational design was appropriate because it provided a quantitative description of the relationship without inferring causation.

The target population was 658 teachers and 3000 students from 7 girls' secondary schools in Narok West Sub-County. The sample size was calculated using Nassiuma's (2000) formula.

$$n = \frac{N(cv^2)}{cv^2 + (N-1)e^2}$$

Where,
n a represents the sample size
N is the population
is the coefficient of variation (0.6).

e is the tolerance of the desired confidence level of 0.05 at a 95 per cent significance level.

The calculation of sample sizes for students and teachers yielded 1080 students and 184 teachers. Proportional stratified sampling was used to allocate the sample across school categories in the sub-county (national, extra-county, county, and sub-county schools). The teachers and students were proportionally distributed across the three school categories in the county, and proportionate stratified sampling was used to allocate the sample to each school category.

A questionnaire for teachers and students was used to collect data. Section A of the questionnaire collected demographic information from participants, while items in Section B collected data on the relationship between the ban on early marriage and girls' completion of secondary education. Section C found the completion rates for girls in schools over the previous five-year period. The items were structured on the 4-point Likert Scale.

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained before data collection from Kabarak University Ethics Review Committee (KUREC), and thereafter, a research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Research, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The permit was submitted before the Narok West Sub-County Education Office, which issued a letter of introduction to all the schools in the sub county.

Thereafter, the study commenced. Participation was voluntary for all respondents, and informed consent was obtained from each. Parental consent was obtained via the schools. Participants were told very clearly that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or consequence, even after completing the questionnaires and interviews. Participants were guaranteed that data would be kept confidential. The female researcher sat down with the girls and explained the study, and obtained their verbal consent before starting. Responses were anonymous, and no identifying information was collected for the respondents to the questionnaires. For the interview participants, all transcripts and reports were pseudonymized with no identifying details. Any identifying detail was removed or altered.

The data were securely stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Information will be kept for 5 years, after which it will be securely destroyed by shredding. The respondents were assured that the information they provided would be used solely for academic research purposes and that they would be protected from physical, psychological, social, or economic harm during the study.

Data was sorted, edited, coded, cleaned, and processed. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, and inferential statistics, such as cross-tabulation and correlation, were used to analyse the data. Quantitative data were presented in tables as was appropriate. Descriptive statistics was instrumental in analysing quantitative data by calculating frequencies and percentages, which were presented using tables, charts, and graphs. Multivariate regression analysis was performed to test the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Regression was conducted to analyse the nature and the strength of the relationship between every independent variable and the dependent variable (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). It helped to explore the forms of these relationships (Kothari, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Girls Completion of Secondary School Education

Data on completion rates were provided by the teachers. Completion rates were computed by dividing the number of a cohort that sat for KCSE by the number that enrolled in form 1, and expressing the ratio as a percentage. The completion rate was established by determining those of cohorts 2017 and 2018 and averaging them, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Completion Dates Based on the Data Provided by Teachers

Year	Number enrolled in Form 1	Number Completed Form 4	Completion rate
2017	9692	7211 (completed in 2020)	74.4
2018	9849	7416 (completed in 2021	75.3
Mean			74.9

The results indicate that the completion rate of cohort 2018 (75.3%) was slightly higher than that of 2017 (74.4%). The mean completion rate was (74.9%). These results imply that about a quarter of girls enrolled in form one did not complete their secondary education. This concurs with Mackatiani et al. (2022), who concluded that the number of girls admitted to form one continued to decline each year over the four years of secondary education.

Prohibition of FGM and Girls' Completion of Secondary School Education

The relationship between the prohibition of FGM and girls' completion of secondary school education was examined. The respondents' perceptions of FGM prohibition were determined and related to completion rates. The hypothesis test made it possible to determine whether the relationship between the prohibition of FGM and girls' completion of secondary education was statistically significant or not. This was tested using Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between Prohibition of FGM Policy and Completion Rates

Scale	Scale	Completion of Secondary Education
FGM Prohibition Mean Score	Pearson Correlation	.019
FGM Prohibition Mean Score	p-value	.858
FGM Prohibition Mean Score	N	87

The correlation results reveal a positive relationship (r=.019) between the prohibition of FGM and girls' completion of secondary school. This indicates that completion rates increased with the effective enforcement of the FGM prohibition act. However, an examination of the results further shows that the association between the two constructs was statistically insignificant (p=.858). This is evidence that the prohibition on FGM did not significantly affect completion rates. These findings support the hypothesis that the relationship between the prohibition of FGM policy and completion rates was not statistically significant. The implication of this finding is that FGM laws have not been effectively enforced. Meroka-Mutua (2020) notes that criminalisation of FGM often conflicts with other semi-autonomous fields such as culture and religion. To avoid penalties under the law, individuals find ways to circumvent it. This means that fear of the law drives the practice further underground, and individuals feel they cannot freely report incidents for fear that they, or others close to them, would face penal sanctions. Andiema (2021) indicated that cultural factors negatively impact the education of girls, hindering their transition, academic performance and acquisition of essential knowledge needed for basic survival.

The finding is in line with Zakayo and Lekule (2022), who showed a significantly low transition rate of Maasai girls from secondary to higher education, primarily due to FGM. Zakayo and Lekule (2022) also opine that the

indoctrination of Maasai girls regarding social and cultural values influences the tendency to easily surrender education and enter into early marriage commitments earlier than anticipated. As a result of this indoctrination, girls often become captives, not just of their culture, but also of their own choices. Walela (2020) considers FGM as a preparation for marriage and a recipe for dropping out of school. Mutundu (2024) noted that the psychosocial identity that girls adopted after undergoing FGM, along with their negative attitudes toward schooling and poor relationships with teachers, adversely affected their transitions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study has demonstrated that the dropout rate due to FGM profoundly influences girls' educational attainment. As a result, the study concludes that the prohibition of FGM has a positive relationship (r=.019) with girls' completion of secondary school in Narok West Sub-County. However, FGM is still being practised, albeit at lower levels, despite the implementation of the anti-FGM legislation. This is evident in disturbed school attendance as preoccupation with FGM tends to take away girls' concentration from studies, which significantly hinders their school completion. The disconnect between the FGM Prohibition Act and school completion (p=.858p=.858) highlights a policy-practice gap. To bridge this, the legal prohibition must be supported by grassroots cultural re-engineering that addresses the girl's psychosocial identity, ensuring that her transition into womanhood is marked by a graduation cap rather than a marriage certificate.

Recommendations: The study recommends that the government should prioritise counselling and emotional support to help girls recover from FGM trauma by recruiting and placing teachers with relevant qualifications and experience in counselling education. In addition, the government should invest in specialised training programs for all education stakeholders in Narok West Sub-County to create awareness about the dangers of FGM and the need to embrace alternative rites of passage. The school management should also closely monitor school attendance and use role model girls to prevent further drop-out cases and improve secondary school transition rates. The government should provide comprehensive support and resources to ensure that girls affected by FGM receive the necessary support to complete their education. In addition, there is a need for ongoing education and advocacy to change societal norms and attitudes towards FGM.

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