

## **Influence of Household Income Level on Secondary School Dropout in Kenya.**

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### **Abstract**

This study sought to examine the extent to which household income level influences the dropout rate from day secondary schools in Murang'a East Sub-County. This study employed structural strain theory and school dropout and poor family socialization theory and drop outting. The study took pragmatic research philosophy and a descriptive research design to study the phenomena in Murang'a East Sub-County. Using questionnaires, data relating to socio-economic data were collected from about 300 dropouts from Murang'a East Sub-County who were selected using a convenient and snowballing sampling technique. The research established that the level of household income have a bearing on secondary school dropout from Murang'a East Sub-County. The research concludes that secondary school drop outting has a significant drawback to the educational goals and objectives. Secondary school education continues to be a vital investment despite the challenge of drop out. Most of the students who drop out of secondary schools are social and economic reasons. The study recommends that the government should increase the allocations to the most vulnerable students. Also, the CBOs and NGOs to step in and offer such students the supply of social amenities such as sanitary towels. More efforts should be focused on sensitizing the importance of secondary school education and advocating for child labour to be dealt with fiercely.

**Key Terms:** School Dropout, household income, social-economic factors.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to ILO (1949), “everyone has a right to education.” Similarly, Kenya's constitution 53 (1) (b) requires that every child access free and compulsory education. The constitution of Kenya Article 55 (a) states that the government shall take enough measures to ensure that every Kenyan youth has access to education and training. Article 55 (b) provides that the marginalized groups and the minority groups shall be given an equal opportunity in education. To this effect, the government of Kenya is committed to offering free primary school education and subsidized secondary schools' education in Kenya. However, UNESCO (2020) observes that school dropout is still prevalent in Kenya.

UNESCO (2020) notes a huge productivity difference between educated and not. This is because those educated are more informed and instituted with skills required for developing a country's economy. Wambui (2017) observes that educated individuals can plan for their lives, provide for their children, live healthy lives, and abide by the laws and regulations of the land, all of which are pre-requisites to a country's development. Therefore, investment in education is viewed as the best option for creating and increasing all types of development in a country (Mwikya, 2018). Consequently, Haugan et al. (2019) observe that a deviation from the education system would mean harming its development prospects.

Kenya, akin to other developing countries, has challenges ensuring that all children of school-going ages are in school and the quality education is provided equally to all children (Choudhary AI, 2015). A report by the Ministry of education notes that many children of school-going ages are out of school to date (MoE, 2019). Despite these efforts, the goal of education for all is still under threat from the high dropout levels, especially for individuals in secondary schools. Data from Education for All (EFA) indicates that close to 57 million children were out of

school in 2011 (UNESCO, 2019). This means that the goal of achieving complete primary education is still a pipe-dream among various nations globally. According to UNESCO, worse still is the number of children not attending school, which had reached 262 million globally (UNESCO, 2019). The core reason for this was cited as increased conflicts globally, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, rendering scores of children homeless (UNESCO, 2019). Additionally, the report records another core contributor to school dropout: adverse climate changes that caused drought, floods, and other menaces, forcing the affected children to leave school before completion.

The government's intention in offering subsidized day secondary school education was to ensure that children all over the county find an opportunity to develop themselves and contribute handsomely to the country's economic development. However, UNICEF (2019) observes that secondary school dropout is challenging to attain this goal. UNESCO's (2019) report on “school dropout pattern and solution in Africa” indicates that the school dropout rate is about 16.8%. The District Education Board data, Murang'a East Sub-County, shows that the secondary school dropout rate from Murang'a East Sub-County is about 23%. Therefore, there is an alarming disparity between the national dropout rate and Murang'a East Sub-County dropout rates. This calls specific focus on the reasons behind the high dropout rates in Murang'a East Sub-County. To gainfully benefit from the FDSE, the specific problems preventing the retention of students in secondary schools need to be addressed. This study, therefore, focused on examining the extent to which household income level influences the drop-out rate from day secondary schools in Murang'a East Sub-County

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Farnworth and Leiber (1989, p. 327), household income refers to the combined income of all persons sharing a place of residence. Glavin (2016)

observes that household income determines a more considerable extent of the family's social-economic status. This income supports the family's basic needs, including the entire family's educational needs. Due to its importance in supporting education, many researchers have tried to study the influence of the level of household income on school dropout.

Research by Adelman and Szekely (2016) found a moderate correlation between high school dropout and low household income in Central America. The study suggests that students from low-income family backgrounds have struggled in meeting the basic requirements for completing the high school dropout, which adversely affects their schooling and may consequently result in dropout. The study used a systematic overview to analyse secondary school dropouts' available secondary data in Central America. Therefore, the study is limited in that grey literature is not included in the studies, which means biased perspectives. This implies a need to extend the study of the phenomena using primary data to confirm the findings of this research. A second limitation is that the study was based in Central America. Hence, there is a need to conduct similar research in other parts to confirm the generalization of this study's findings.

Another study by Dockery (2018) on indicators of high school dropout found out that coming from low household income is among the leading reasons students drop out of school in Asia. The study observes that students from families with low incomes struggle with fee repayment and paying for other fees related to education, resulting in ultimate dropout if due care is not taken for such students. The study used cross-country examination with three sets of data from the three different countries, which raises challenges on data analysis. There is, therefore, a probability that the results were analysed following the researcher's preferences meaning that it might be biased. Therefore, there is a need to perform similar studies in

other parts of the world to confirm this study's generalization. The current study uses a single set of data from high school dropouts from Murang'a East Sub-County and ensures the accuracy of data analysis. The current study is based in Murang'a East Sub-County, Murang'a County, Kenya, which will confirm the findings of Dockery (2018) in this area.

Mueni (2017), in her study on "socio-economic determinants of boys' dropout rate from public secondary school in Kalungu Sub-County Makueni County," found out that parent income levels influence boys drop-out rate from public secondary schools in Kalungu Sub-County. In her study, Mueni observes that boys from low household incomes tend to drop out of school to assist their parents in meeting the basic needs of their families. Others drop out of secondary school due to lack of school fees and failing to meet other latent educational charges. Her study involved principals, teachers, and students already in school. Therefore, there is a need to cross-examine those who have already dropped out of school to know their specific reasons for dropping out of school instead of opinions. This study, therefore, purposed to examine those who have already dropped out of school and get the socio-economic reasons for students to drop out of secondary school from 'the horse's mouth.' The study by Mueni (2017) was based in Makueni County. There is, therefore, a need to conduct a similar study in other counties that the current study fills by studying the socio-economic determinants of day secondary school drop-out rates in Murang'a East Sub-County in Murang'a County.

## RESULTS

### **The Influence of Household Income on Drop-out Rates**

The respondents were required to respond to the household income level by dropping out of secondary school. Their responses were analysed using SPSS and the summary presented in the table below:

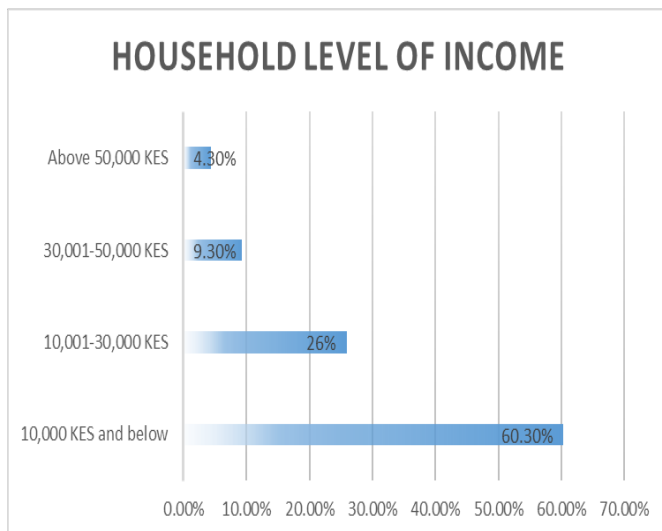
**Table 1: Household Level of Income**

**What was your family's total Household income by the time you dropped out of school**

Level of Income	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
10,000 KES and below	181	60.3	60.3	60.3
10,001-30,000 KES	78	26.0	26.0	86.3
30,001-50,000 KES	28	9.3	9.3	95.7
Above 50,000 KES	13	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

**Source: (Author Data, 2020)**

Table 1 shows that out of 300 respondents, 181 had their monthly household income as KES 10,000 and below. Seventy-eight of the respondents had their monthly household income between KES 10,000 and KES 30,000. Twenty-eight respondents had their monthly household income between KES 30,001 and KES 50,000. Finally, only 13 of the 300 respondents had their monthly household income above KES 50,000. The percentages of these monthly incomes were analysed further as follows



**Figure 1: Household Level of Income** (Source: Author Data, 2020).

The analysis showed that the majority (60.30%) of the dropouts come from families with low-income levels, i.e.,

families earning KES 10,000 and below. This suggests a relationship between low household incomes and secondary school in Murang'a-East Sub-County. Low household incomes suggest the families struggled to meet the students' basic needs. According to the structural strain theory, this might result in students dropping out of school to ease the pressure on their families' household income.

These results are akin to Ingram's (2019) findings that found a high positive correlation between low household incomes and high upper secondary school dropout rates in Mexico. Another study by Boston (2017) observes that children from low-income earning families are likely to drop out of school. According to Ingram (2019), students from low-income families lack sufficient funds to fund their school fees and latent educational needs. Ingram (2019) observes that though the government of Mexico has tried to subsidize the cost of education, the cost is still high for low-income earners. Boston (2017) attributes high secondary school dropout to poverty. Boston (2017) argues that low-income families fail to provide for their children's basic needs, and hence they cannot concentrate in school. The concentration in school leads to poor performances in School. According to academic meditation theory, poor performance in school leads to negative attitudes towards education, which eventually results in dropout.

Ndiku (2007), in his study on "the issue of poverty and secondary school dropout in Kenya," observes that most

low-income families or low-income earning families lack enough amenities to support their children's education. Ndiku (2007) argues that most low-income families in Kenya do not afford electricity. Their students, therefore, do not find the light to study in their homes. The lack of personal studies translates to poor performances in school, resulting in the development of negative attitudes towards education, leading to dropping out of school. Another study by Julius (2015) on education and poverty in Transzoia County found out that students from low-income families tend to drop out of secondary school to help their families raise income to support their families basic needs.

Bentaouet et al. (2015) attribute the high drop-out rates among girls to low incomes among dropout families. According to Bentaouet Kattan and Székely (2015), low-income families cannot provide necessary social amenities to girls, such as sanitary towels, which results in disruption

of girls' education and leads to dropout. Another study by Wambugu and Mokoena (2017) indicates that lack of these social amenities among girls from low-income families in Limuru District, Kenya leads to them being involved in income-generating activities, including prostitution which leads to them dropping out of secondary school. Therefore, it can be concluded that low household income has a stake in high day-secondary schools' drop-out rates in Murang'a East Sub-County.

### Parents Occupation

The parents' occupations determine the level of income to the household (Ngunjiri, 2019). The research sought to establish the respondents' parents' occupation to this effect. The questionnaire required the respondents to indicate their mothers' and father's occupations to solicit a response to this aim. The results were as follows:

**Table 2: Fathers Occupation**

**What was your father's occupation when you dropped out of school?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Self Employed	30	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Salaried Employment	21	7.0	7.0	17.0
	Farming	120	40.0	40.0	57.0
	Casual Worker	129	43.0	43.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: (Author Data, 2020)

Table 2 shows that about 43 per cent of the respondent's fathers were casual workers, 40 per cent were farmers, 10 per cent were in self-employment, and only 7 per cent were in salaried employment by the time the respondents dropped out of secondary school.

**Table 3: Mothers Occupation**

**What was your mother's occupation when you dropped out of school?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Self Employed	24	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Salaried Employment	9	3.0	3.0	11.0
	Farming	213	71.0	71.0	82.0
	Casual Worker	54	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Source: (Author Data, 2020)

Table 3 shows that 71 per cent of the respondents' mothers were farmers. 18 per cent were casual workers, 8 per cent were in self-employment, while only 3 per cent were in salaried employment by the time the respondents dropped out of school. In conclusion, it is observed that a majority of the respondents' parents were in farming and casual labour occupations, which are associated with low incomes. This explains why the respondent's household incomes were low at the dropout. This result agrees with the findings by Data Science LTD (2017) that found out that about 70 per cent of the Kenyan population belong to middle and lower class income brackets. Another study by Pop and Goldiş (2016) found out that the parent's occupation influences the school drop-out rates. According to Pop and Goldiş (2016) majority of the dropouts in Ghana drop out of school to assist their parents in farming.

#### **Respondents Opinion on the Influence of Household Income on Dropout**

The research sought to establish the respondent's opinion on how household income influenced their dropout. To solicit a response to this statement, "students from low household incomes are most likely to drop out of secondary school in Murang'a East Sub-County." The respondents were required to respond to this statement on a four-point Likert scale for 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-agree, and 4-strongly agree. The results are as summarized in the table below:

**Table 4: Influence of low household Income on Dropout**

Opinion	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	18	6
Strongly Disagree	27	9
Agree	87	29
Strongly Agree.	168	56
Total	300	100
Mean	3.35	
Standard Deviation	0.87753	

Source: (Author Data, 2020)

Table 4 shows that out of 300 respondents, 18 (6%) disagreed with the statement that students from low household income are likely to drop out of secondary school. 27 (9%) strongly disagreed with this statement. However, a more significant number, 87 (29%), agreed to this statement, and the majority, 168 (56%), strongly agreed to this statement. The overall level of the agreement had a mean of 3.35, meaning that on average, the respondents agreed that students from low-income families have a higher probability of dropping out of school than those with high household income. Their agreement level had a low standard deviation of 0.87753, meaning the difference between those who agreed and those that disagreed is minimal. Therefore, it can be concluded that low household incomes influence the high secondary school drop-out rate in Murang'a East Sub-County.

The research found out that most secondary school drop-outs (60.30%) come from families with low household incomes, i.e., families earning KES 10,000 and below. 93 per cent of the dropouts' fathers were in low-income generating occupations such as casual labour and farming. 97 per cent of the dropouts' mothers were in low-income generating occupations such as farming and self-employment. When the respondents were asked their opinion on low household income to have influenced their dropout, they agreed (mean-3.35) with a low standard deviation of 0.87753. Therefore, it can be concluded that household income has a bearing on secondary school drop-out rates in Murang'a East Sub-County.

The student's parents' low household incomes suggest that their parents might at one time fail to pay their school fees in time or completely fail to pay for their school fees. The students are then sent home for the school fees meaning that they will fail to attend their learning usually. This, in effect, translates to poor performance, which kills the students' appetite for schooling and ignites the need to drop out of school. According to Crain-Doroug (2019), the extent and ability to pay school fees and in good time

determine the retention of students in school. Chappell (2017) notes that students from low-income family backgrounds lack essential amenities at home such as better housing, lighting, and food required for a better learning environment. Therefore Chappell (2017) suggests that the students view learning as exploitive and punitive and might opt to drop out as opposed to suffering in school.

In Murang'a East Sub-County, most day secondary schools do not have facilitated transport vehicles to ferry students to and from school. It's, therefore, the parent's responsibility to facilitate the students' transport to and from school (MoE, 2019). Therefore, if the family household income is low, it's probable that the parent won't afford the required transport money. Lack of transport money suggests that students will have to walk the distances to and from school. This increases the strain caused by secondary school education, which will lead to drop-out according to general strain theory.

It can be then concluded that low household incomes determine a students' dropout significantly. This is because a student from families with low income has limited access to money for schools' fees that we discussed earlier that determines to a more considerable extent the probability a student will drop out of secondary school. Low-income families cannot hire houses to cover the household chores, which means that their students are burdened with heavy household chores. Also, low-income families do not afford money to pay for students' tuition. A student is guided on subjects that he/he perceives to be difficult, which means a continuation of poor performance that eventually leads to dropout. All these factors and others discussed in this

section explain why low household income determines secondary school dropout in Murang'a East Sub-County.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

**Conclusion:** The secondary school drop outing has a significant drawback to the educational goals and objectives. Secondary school education continues to be a vital investment despite the challenge of drop out. Most of the students who drop out of secondary schools are social and economic reasons. In reaching out to social-economic determinants of secondary school dropout, the first objective sought to establish the effects of household income on dropout. The study established that most students who drop out of secondary school come from households with incomes below average or those who belong to the lower social class. This shows an inverse relationship between household incomes and dropout.

**Recommendation:** There are gaps in day secondary schools' education that the government can fill through the ministry of education to reduce secondary school dropout rates. One of them is to increase the allocations to the most vulnerable students. This will ensure that the school has an adequate provision of social amenities to offer to their needy students. The ministry should also ensure that each school has an operational guidance and counselling department with qualified professionals in this field. This will ensure that students get proper guidance wherever in need of some. Also, the CBOs and NGOs to step in and offer such students the supply of social amenities such as sanitary towels. More efforts should be focused on sensitizing the importance of secondary school education and advocating for child labour to be dealt with fiercely.

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