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### Examining Dropout Among Girl Students: Influence of Peer Group and Measures in Public Secondary Schools in Kondo Town Council

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Peers play a vital role in influencing the behaviour and lifestyle of a particular student while at school. However, the influence of friends in ensuring girl student endeavour in education at school is oversimplified into a casual friendship rather than warranting their cooperation in learning until completion. As a result, many schools in Tanzania are experiencing high girl-child school dropouts. It is for this reason, this study sought to examine the influence of peer groups on girl-students dropping out of secondary school. The study also explored possible measures that can be employed to curb the dropout of female students in secondary school. In conducting this study, the study employed a mixed research approach and convergent parallel design. Data was collected through interviews and questionnaires involving 143 respondents including female students, teachers, heads of schools, and district educational officers. The findings from this study indicate that while the government of Tanzania has made remarkable efforts to ensure girls' continuity and successful completion of secondary education, there are a number of factors hindering girls' continuity and completion of secondary education. Imitation of other students' lifestyles at school as well as association with other peers who lack interest in schooling were among the reasons for continuous girl-child school dropout. Hence, based on my findings the significance of girl's education as well as the role which parents should play in guiding and counselling girls to ensure girls achievement of education, Therefore, strategic efforts should be made in raising more awareness among rural and marginalized communities about the importance of educating girls and the role of guidance and counselling in bringing to an end the phenomena of girl-child school. Moreover, I call upon all parents, to make deliberate efforts in guiding and counselling girls to make a proper selection of friends and strive towards achieving formal education.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Friends and teachers are considered as a family a student has while at school. As a famous bible verse "Show me your friends and I will show you your character" (*King James Bible, Proverbs 13: 20*), most friends determine the behavior and lifestyle of a particular student while at school. This is to say that Peer groups are great agents in the academic achievement or fall of a particular student. It is probably for this reason Humlum and Thorsager (2021) said that the academic ability of peers may influence dropout by affecting a student's (girl) own ability which in turn may decrease the probability of dropping out or peer ability can affect other dimensions such as the behaviour of a girl student. This means that a good friend may be useful in handling other negative influences in the education of female students. Also, Fischer (2017) suggested that most girls are affected by their group of friends while at school and it is less likely for them to graduate when grouped with higher-ability peers.

According to Wimmer and Lewis (2010), Most teenagers typically become friends with people who share prominent traits with them such as behaviour. This might influence their retention in school. Moreover, Gao et al. (2019) contend that relationship with peers has a significant influence on a student's decision to continue schooling or not. Whereas, most of the students (girls) drop out of school due to poor relationships with classmates in school which results in negative social experiences. Gao et al. further argue that rejection from peers (classmates) or lack of friends in the classroom may increase the risk of school disengagement, with friends acting as an important buffer against negative social

experiences. Moreover, Johnson (2022) claims that some girl students drop out of school due to the influence of their friends with bad behavior or whom they associate with when outside the school. This means when a girl student is associated with friends who have a positive influence on their school life and social life, the likelihood is that the child will get a good environment in their academic and persevere in their education journey.

It is from this venture that several efforts have been made by the government of Tanzania to reduce school dropouts and ensure that girls complete their secondary education. For instance, the Introduction of SEDP I and SEDP II to improve access with equity, quality management, and delivery of secondary education to all students including girls in Tanzania (URT, 2023). Also, the government of Tanzania emphasizes quality education as a prerequisite for any programme or circular implementation (Hakielimu, 2010). Such programs include the introduction of free basic education for all (primary education and lower secondary school) in 2015, and the circular aimed at ensuring the provision of free secondary education to all including girls (right to Education Initiatives, 2016). Moreover, different stakeholders like Hakielimu and women activists such as TAMWA, TAWLA, and Msichana Initiatives have been advocating for girl children's right to education through policy formulation and campaigns. Such efforts have enhanced the number of girls enrolled in schools in recent years. For example, Hakielimu (2011) has been advocating for the rights of the girl children who leave or from school because of pregnancy. It suggests that girl child students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy should be given

another opportunity and be encouraged to continue with their studies after giving birth. Also, introducing a re-admission circular to ensure students who dropped out due to different reasons including girls get the chance to complete their formal education (URT, 2021).

Despite all the efforts done by government and non-governmental organizations to ensure support for girls to pursue formal education as a right to life and a basic necessity of their well-being, statistics reveal that female students are still leading in school dropouts. According to the United Republic of Tanzania (URT), (2012-2016), 48.5 percent of girl students dropped out of secondary school in 2015, and in the following year in 2016, there was a very minor difference with a dropout of 47.37 percent. The cases were recorded for both the government and private secondary schools. In addition to this, in 2019, World Bank data revealed that the dropout of students still exists especially among girls whereby less than one-third of the girls who enter lower secondary school graduate. Furthermore, Basic education statistics from Dodoma region show a high dropout rate of female students by the year 2020 were 2762 while statistics from year 2021 were 3256 and year 2022 were 4477 respectively (URT, 2020; URT, 2021 And URT, 2023). This indicator is alarming as to what could be the reason for the increasing number of girls dropout. This concern cannot be addressed without conducting a rigorous study. Therefore, leading to an argument that there is a need to respond correctly to solve this problem and prevent any additional loss of the country's workforce that may result in a nation full of illiterate women given this circumstance and the long-term implications that we, as educators, may predict. It is for this reason that this study was conducted to find out how peer group influences girls' dropouts in public secondary schools. In addition, the study explored possible measures to address the problem.

### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To determine the extent to which peer influence increases of dropout rate among female students in public secondary schools in Kondoa Town council
- To find out measures to be taken to curb the dropout rate among female students in public secondary schools in Kondoa Town council

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

An extensive examination of the theoretical and empirical literature was done before undertaking this investigation. Therefore, for this investigation, many literature sources were evaluated critically. To conduct this study, deviant affiliation theory was used to carry out this investigation. Deviant Affiliation Theory is a theory that was identified by Battin-Pearson et al. (2000). The theory propounds that school dropout is a result of peer relationships. Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) as cited in Danovska (2018), the theory mainly focuses on the negative influence and relationship as the factor for dropout. Danovska further adds that family relationship as well as relationships with friends plays a major role due to shared traits, characteristics, and school experiences. This idea is essential to comprehending how peer pressure affects school abandonment among female students in Tanzania. According to the theory, a student's friends or peers can have a significant influence on their decision-making process and are among the various reasons that are most likely to cause a female student to drop out of school. This means that a girl with a friend who has a negative influence on her either at home or at school is likely to drop out of school due to the strong influence they have on her because of the shared traits.

### **Understanding Peer Group and School Dropout**

#### ***Peer Group***

Various scholars have conceptualized different peer groups. According to Spadafora et al. (2019) peer group is a group of people approximately the

same age who have similar interests, backgrounds or social status. Moreover, the members of the group are likely to influence an individual's perception or behaviours. Spadafora et al. (2019) further argue that, peer groups may not only provide a positive context for children and youth to be a part of beneficial relationships but can also have a large influence on the behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes of the individual members of the group. Also, Filade et al. (2019), conceptualize peer group as a healthy coming-of-age intermediary, by which youth grasp negotiating skills and learn to deal with challenges and solve problems in a social context. Also, according to Ajibade (2016) peer group is the association of close friends of the same sex, who are bound together by common emotional attachment and have a complex social system in which they possess certain codes of conduct such as dressing codes. Therefore, based on the concepts given by scholars, a peer group can be generally referred to as a group of individuals who share similar traits such as sex, class, and belief to mention a few, and affect each other.

### ***School Dropout***

The idea of dropping out of school is not new. It is one of the topics that experts from all over the world have studied extensively. Due to many studies and the contexts in which the studies were conducted, the term has come to be understood and defined differently. Kurian et al. (2023), conceptualizes school dropout as a situation whereby learners leave their studies without obtaining completion certification. According to Ferreira et al. (2021) school, dropouts refer to the children who leave school before completion of their studies. Given the various perspectives on school dropout as a circumstance or as a student who is unable to finish their studies, generally speaking, school dropout can be defined as a situation in which a student leaves school before completing their education for a variety of reasons.

### **How Peer Groups Influence School Dropout of Secondary Girl Students**

It is an undeniable truth that a friend or peer group contributes to an individual's overall academic and social development as well as their emotional and psychological well-being. Based on this viewpoint, it is fair to argue that peer group has a significant influence on the academic development and school retention of female students. Different studies have discussed the issue of peer groups and how they influence the school dropout of female students. A study conducted in India by Augustine et al. (2020) denotes that peer influence and pressure are considered one of the reasons for school dropout in India. Especially youths who do not have basic needs for their personal recognition and various pleasurable experiences turn to peer groups to seek such needs. Beshel et al. (2022) conducted a study to examine the influence of peer groups on students' dropout tendencies in an evening continuing education programme in Nigeria. The study revealed that peer group influence and level of indiscipline had significant positive predictions on dropout tendency among the students. Boup et al. (2018) noted that in Kenya, students drop out of school under the influence of others who had opted out, this often occurs when children meet after school to play games, at school or home the students whom their parents or guardians are not strict thus children get away with such behaviour. Boup et al. (2018) further argued that the influence of peer group pressure is higher in day school where children go home daily after classes than in boarding school.

In a study conducted in Kenya, Omollo and Yambo (2017) found out that, some students drop out of school due to the influence of their peers who are indiscipline, leading to a loss of interest in education as well as teen pregnancies. In addition to that, Effiom and Jacks (2019) added that in Nigeria, peer influence and quest for money have been a contributor to school dropout among girls in high percentage where it has been a tendency to make it look good and no teenager want to be left out since they want to have a sense of belongingness. This behaviour of seeking

crumbs from men has led to a lot of pregnancies which resulted in school dropout (Effiom & Jacks, 2019). A study conducted by Minja (2021) on school-based strategic management for reducing girls' dropout in secondary schools in the Babati district revealed that peer pressure is the cause of girls' dropping out permanently. The girls who have friends out of school are influenced or convinced to be truant and eventually drop out of school. This implies that friends outside the school can have a negative influence since most of them might be ex-dropouts.

### **Measures Taken to Eliminate the Dropout of Secondary School Girl Students**

Most secondary school girls students encounter a lot of issues that influence them to drop out of school. Therefore, there must be actions to be taken at least to reduce some of the difficulties or eliminate them so that they can study comfortably until completion of their secondary education. The following actions have been revealed in different related literature to help curb school dropouts among female students.

A study conducted by Rutakinikwa (2016) on factors influencing secondary school girls' dropout in Bagamoyo revealed that the provision of education and a campaign on the importance of girls' education would help to increase awareness among education stakeholders. Rugimbana and Mwila (2023) in a study conducted in Temeke Municipal, further added that girls should be given education for better awareness so that they can make better decisions that won't jeopardize their education journey such as better selection of friends to interact with. Rutakinikwa (2016) further contends that some parents are less interested in education, thus they tend to ignore most issues about schooling and, the provision of education to their girls, follow up on their academic development by checking regularly their exercise books after school, going to school and checking up their attendance through their class teacher. Subrahmanyam (2016) further argues that clubs should be introduced in the community where girls shall be able to participate and give their views concerning their education.

A study conducted by Ngure (2019) on the influence of counselling on dropout among primary students in Kenya suggested that girls should receive guidance and counselling both at school and at home. Ngure further claims that, receiving this service from trained counsellors will help reduce the likelihood of them dropping out due to peer influence. In a study conducted by Nita et al. (2021), the findings showed that teachers should practice the principles of guidance and counselling they learned in higher learning and teachers' colleges to help minimize or curb chances of the girls dropping out of school. Parents should also learn to have talks with their children about the different challenges they are going through as they grow into adulthood as well as on proper selection of friends who do not encourage them to jeopardize their education.

Hostels and dormitories should be built to accommodate girls near the school to minimize or completely curb the risks of them to dropout because of the temptation and challenges girl students face at home or on the way to school from peer groups (Sathwika & Reey, 2019). A study conducted by Tanzania Youth Vision Association (2017) suggested that, to eliminate secondary school girls' dropouts, schools should be provided with transport or hostels constructed to accommodate students (girls) who walk long distances because they lack bus fare or feel uncomfortable studying in the home environment. Also, Rutakinikwa (2016), found that the building of hostels and dormitories for female students in schools will provide a suitable studying environment for the female students.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted a mixed research approach and a convergent parallel research design. The use of this approach allowed us to use not only different methods of data collection and analysis but also it enabled us to collect a wider range of data for a deeper understanding of the problem. Furthermore, the approach provided us an extra room to use several data collection methods as well as merge the information obtained to provide

clear answers to the research problem. To ensure the reliability of the findings, this study employed both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews. A sample size of 143 respondents was involved in data collection. The sample was made up of 93 girls, and 46 teachers from three schools. Additionally, three heads of school and 1 educational officer were also involved in this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants for interviews such as Education officers and head teachers while simple random sampling was used to select girl-students and stratified simple random sampling for teachers.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive while qualitative data were analysed thematically.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the endeavour to understand how peer groups influence dropout among female students in secondary school in Kondoa town council, open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted. The data collected were obtained from the District Secondary Education Officer, head of schools, teachers and girl students. The findings of the study revealed that most of the girls dropped out of secondary school because of the influence they got from their friends at school or home.

**Figure 1: Influence of Peer Groups on Secondary School Girls Dropout**

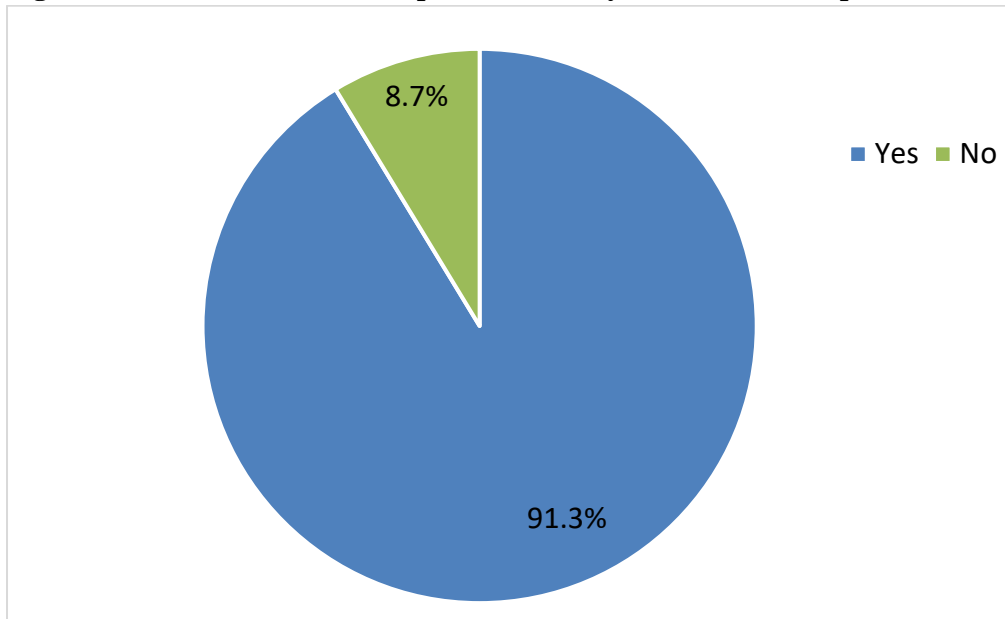


Figure 1 indicates the influence of peer groups on secondary school girls' dropout in Kondoa town council. According to the figure above, the majority of the respondents (91.3%) agreed that most of the girls dropped out of secondary school due to peer influence. However, 8.7% of the respondents disagreed that peer group was a factor in secondary school girls' dropout. This is because girls at the secondary level are mature enough to judge the opinions they receive from their friends. Therefore, since the findings showed that the majority agreed, it means that girls dropped out of secondary school because of the negative

influence from friends in similar situations at school or who had already dropped out of school and were at home.

### **Influence of Peer Group at School**

#### ***Imitating the Lives of Other Friends at School***

Imitation of other friends' lives came up strongly as a way peers influenced secondary school girls to drop out of school. The majority of teachers who contributed to this study said that to female students, friends are an important group of people whom girls need most to make their schooling

experience meaningful and successful in their studies. However, their social situation risked their chance of having friends who would bring positive changes to what they were going through in their education journey. Therefore, most of the girls' dropout in secondary school were caused by the negative influence they encountered at school from their friends. For example, one teacher wrote, "Many girls have dropped out of our school because they wanted to live by imitating what other friends are doing". Likewise, another participant who spoke in Kiswahili on how girls start to behave before they drop out of school said,

*"Mabinti hawa wanaanza kubadilika kitabia, uoro na pia kushuka, mwisho wa siku kumbe ameshajiingiza katika mahusiano ya kimapenzi au ajira kwasababu tu rafiki yake anafanya hivyo. Hii inawafanya wanashindwa kugawa muda wa masomo na hayo mambo mengine mwishowe huacha shule kabisa". [Translation: These girls start with behavioral change, absenteeism as well as dropping academically. At the end of the day, you find that they have already started engaging in sexual affairs or employment just because their friends are doing the same. This makes them fail to balance the time for school and personal timetable; hence, ending up dropping out of school completely].*

This implies that girls in secondary school mostly those who are undergoing social or economic problems are isolated by those from families that are socially or financially stable because they are not of the same level. Thus, these girls decide to choose friends in similar situations as them. As a result, they fall into the trap of girls who have already given up on education but are still at school by starting to do what they do as a sense of belongingness or in order to match the lives of their friends who have isolated them. This is when they start to engage in early sexual affairs with men from outside the school or boys from inside the school end up dropping from school. This finding is similar to that of a study conducted in Kenya by Keraita and Gakunga (2016) who found out that in secondary schools, girls easily fall prey to peer pressure and sugar daddies who can give

them small gifts and other necessary needs that a girl would require such as pads, cloths and money.

On the same note, another respondent argued that "other girls fall into the trap of friends when their families are poor and they are looking for the alternatives to fulfilling their needs". This implies that, some girls do not turn to certain types of friends because they want to, but because of the financial problems they face. They opt to look for friends in a similar situation in order to seek the alternatives they use to survive, hence, finding themselves dropping out of school because of the alternatives recommended by their fellow students. Similarly, a study conducted by Effiom and Jacks (2019), revealed that in Nigeria peer influence and the quest for money have been a contributor to school dropout among girls in schools at an alarming percentage. The study showed that there had been a tendency to make it look good and no teenager wanted to be left out since they wanted to have a sense of belongingness. Effiom and Jacks further point out that, this behaviour of seeking crumbs from men led to a lot of pregnancies which resulted in school dropouts. Indeed, the involvement of girls in improper activities such as early sexual affairs just because a friend is doing it has resulted in high rates of school dropout of many girls in secondary schools.

### **Influence of Peer Group at Home**

The study findings showed that the majority of participants involved in this study noted that girls dropped out of secondary school under the influence of friends who had already dropped out of school as well as from relatives of similar age who lacked interest in education. Such relatives influence the school girls to seek employment in cities or abroad (mostly Arab countries) where they work as housemaids. Participants explained that girls were being deceived that schooling was a waste of time since working abroad like in Arab countries would enable them to get rich in quickly. For Example, speaking of the situation he recently faced as a school head, Sungura shared his experience,

*“Hivi karibuni tumekutana na kesi ya wanafunzi wa kike kadhaa waliokutwa Dodoma mjini wakitoroshwa bila wazazi wao kujua wakipelekwa nchi za Uarabuni kufanya kazi za ndani wakiahidiwa mishahara ni mikubwa” [Translation: Recently I have encountered cases of several girl students who were found at Dodoma Town trying to leave to Arab countries without their parents’ knowledge. They wanted to work as housemaids since they had been promised to get good amount of money as salary].*

This indicates that some girls dropped out of school and left their homes without their parents’ permission in order to work in different cities within or outside the country so that they could earn large amounts of money within short a period of time. The findings of this study are similar to those of a study conducted by Danovska (2018), who found that some girls even drop out of secondary school without their parent’s knowledge and choose work over education. Moreover, this study finding is similar to the deviant affiliation theory by Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) as cited in Danovska (2018), which mainly focused on the negative influence of friends as the main factor for school dropout. The theory supports the findings in this study that peer groups have a high influence on secondary school girls’ dropout in Tanzania.

Therefore, the findings of this study should become a learning point for realization and awareness by awakening the girls to the reality of the issues of proper selection of friends. This means that they should not let their friends determine their future. Also, girls should learn that it is not a must to do what other peers are doing, since, if one’s behaviour is not morally acceptable, as when one is engaged in early sexual affairs or alcoholism, then one should not succumb to the friendship with such an individual. This will help in reducing the chances of their dropout of school before completion of their secondary school education.

## **Measures to Be Taken to Eliminate Secondary School Girls’ Dropout**

This section presents the findings of the measures to be taken in order to curb secondary school girls’ dropout. By using responses obtained through written open-ended questionnaires and interviews, respondents suggested different ways that can be employed to eliminate the problem of school dropout among girls in secondary schools. The suggestions are discussed in the following sub-sections.

### ***Building Dormitories for Girls***

Most of the respondents suggested that the government should build dormitories for the girls which would help to reduce or completely eliminate secondary school dropout. Teachers claimed that building hostels near the school would enhance closer monitoring of the girls by their teachers, especially those who do not receive proper parental care as well as reduce high chances of them being tempted to drop out of school. Also, girls reported that hostels and dormitories would reduce chances of dropout by making them spend most of their time studying instead of doing extra home activities which makes them not concentrate on their studies. Similarly, one head of the school said,

*“Just like in the building of classes, if the community is ready to build dormitories, then we can ask for government support so as to accommodate those girls in their schools to reduce their behaviour of escaping from school and eventually dropping out completely due to friends influence”*

This means that the community should give their support by providing labour or contributing a small amount of money so that government can augment the remaining amount required for building the dormitories. Hostels and dormitories give the girls chances to concentrate on their studies and avoid experiencing the negative influences from friends who have already dropped out of school. The findings of this study are similar to those of a study conducted by Ngure (2019) which suggested that, the building of



hostels and dormitories for girls in each school will provide a safe environment for studying for the female students.

### ***Educating Girls, Parents, and Community on the Importance of Education for Girls***

The majority of the respondents suggested that education should be provided to girls, parents as well as community on the importance of education for girls. This would help to reduce or eliminate the dropout of girls in secondary schools. Moreover, respondents claimed that if this group of people is given education, it could reduce the number of girls who make wrong decisions under the influence of their friends. In the interview with one of the respondents, she was quoted saying,

*“Education should be provided to girls on the importance of education to them so as to help them make proper decisions”*

This implies that educating girls, parents, and the community at large on the importance of education to girls will eliminate girls' dropout. The findings of this study are similar to the study conducted by Rugimbana and Mwila (2023), which suggested that awareness of the importance of education for girls should be provided to families and society in general. Rutakinikwa (2016) further suggests that clubs should be introduced in schools where girls will be educated on life skills to enable them to participate by giving their views concerning their education and making proper decisions about their lives.

### ***Guidance and Counselling***

Findings from the questionnaire to teachers and girl students revealed that guidance and counselling should be given at school as well as at home by parents and guardians. This will help to encourage and motivate girls to attend school without thinking about dropping out of school. It was also revealed that counselling services at home and school will help girl students to know how to select their friends properly. On this idea, one respondent wrote, “Guidance and counselling should be provided by teachers and parents in order to provide psychological support and save girls from the danger of dropping out of school

due to negative influences some of them are facing from their fellow”. Also, in the same line, a head of school suggested, “I encourage the provision of regular guidance and counselling to the girls so as to help them build confidence and help reduce dropout among girls in secondary school”. This means that there should be cooperation among teachers in helping girls by giving them advice at school on the issues of acquaintance with every individual who does not contribute to their education since it may result in their dropping out of school. In addition to this, in an interview with the education officer, Salumu, he advised:

*“Parents should know that their responsibilities do not end after sending the girls to school; they should also use their position as parents to provide guidance and counselling to them whenever they are at home. This will help in motivating and encouraging them as well as enlightening them on different risky issues in their education and guide them on the proper selection of friends in school and at home”*

This implies that, parents should play their role at home by talking with their girls freely by helping them know the criteria of good friends who will help them academically and socially. This will help prevent girls from dropping out of secondary school because of issues like early sexual affairs or pregnancies. The finding of this study is similar to a study conducted by Patrick (2021), which recommended counselling and guidance for school girls at home as well as at school so as to minimize or eliminate the chances of them being negatively influenced by their friends. Patrick (2021) further added that teachers should practice the principles of guidance and counselling they learned in higher learning institutions and teachers' colleges to eliminate girls' dropout in their schools. Parents should also learn to have talks with their girls about the different challenges they are going through as they grow into adulthood as well as talk to them on proper selection of friends who do not influence them negatively.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings and what I have discussed so far, it is fair to conclude that most of the female students dropped out of secondary school because of the influence from their friends. Peer groups influence the dropout of female students because of the indiscipline they got from each other which made them lack focus and interest in education. Apart from that, other girls dropped out of school due to a lack of sense of belongingness and acceptance after being rejected by others because of different issues like financial differences or academic performance. In such groups, the girls would receive advice from their friends on what they should do so that they could raise money in order to be like others. This situation jeopardizes girl's education as they have to conduct their social and academic life to please their friends. Therefore, in my view, the nation cannot achieve its vision as well as that of sustainable development while girls are continually left behind in formal education. Thus, to overcome these challenges the study recommends that more efforts should be made to ensure girls equally get education which will act as an emancipation tool.

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