

Research Article

INFLUENCE OF PEER PRESSURE ON MALE STUDENTS' RETENTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MBOONI WEST SUB-COUNTY, MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

In Mbooni West Sub-County, male student retention in public secondary schools remains a concern despite the government's provision of Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE). This study investigated the effects of peer pressure on male student retention, guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected through questionnaires and interview schedules. Validity was ensured through expert judgment. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, employing descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages, as well as inferential statistics including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically based on the study's objectives and presented in narrative form. The study therefore, concluded that peer pressure were found to have a significant influence on male retention. From the findings the researcher recommended that the school should establish male student welfare programs to address gender-specific challenges and introducing motivational initiatives tailored to male students' needs, the school should engage guest speakers to mentor and guide students on how to positively navigate peer influence, parents should be educated on the critical role they play in their children's education through mandatory school-based sensitization meetings. Parents should be encouraged to develop new income-generating strategies to enhance their ability to pay school fees and meet their sons' educational needs.

Keywords: Peer pressure, male students' retention.

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirms that everyone has the right to education. Following the 1990 Jomtien Conference, global efforts to expand access to education intensified. In Africa, countries like Kenya, Malawi, and Ghana introduced free basic education in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Despite these efforts, access to quality basic education remains a challenge (O'Flaherty & Liddy, 2018). The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and the Salamanca Statement (1994) reaffirmed commitments to universal and inclusive education. However, while progress has been made in girls' education, male student enrolment and retention have declined in many regions (UNESCO, 2012; 2015). Male students often face neglect, lack of support, and societal pressure to enter the workforce early (Tumwebaze, 2011). This trend is evident not only in Africa but also in countries like the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia, where boys underperform and have higher dropout rates (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012). In Asia and the Pacific, similar patterns are observed in countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines (UNGEI, 2012). In Kenya, despite constitutional guarantees for education, retention remains a challenge, especially among male students. In regions such as Central Kenya and Bungoma County, male students are increasingly turning to manual labor, dropping out of school due to economic pressure and feelings of neglect (Mureithi, 2010; Hamasi, 2013). While empowering the girl child is vital, failure to also support male students has led to negative outcomes including substance abuse and crime. In Mbooni West Sub-County, Kenya, there is little evidence of targeted efforts to improve male student retention, highlighting a growing gap that needs urgent attention.

Table 1: Enrolment trend in Mbooni West Sub-County by male student for 2020-2023 cohort.

ENROLMENT	YEAR	NUMBER
FORM ONE	2020	1490
FORM TWO	2021	1454
FORM THREE	2022	1419
FORM FOUR	2023	1359

Source: Ministry of education Makueni County 2020

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943), which outlines human motivation as a progression from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. While traditionally seen as a linear hierarchy, modern interpretations suggest that these needs can overlap and shift based on circumstances (Onah, 2015). In educational settings, especially among male students, unmet basic needs—such as food, safety, and emotional support—can hinder learning and contribute to school dropout (Mumbua, 2020). The theory helped explain how unmet needs at home or school negatively affect male students' retention. Findings revealed that lack of basic support, particularly physiological and social needs, contributes to disengagement and dropout. Peer pressure also emerged as a key factor, where negative influences can undermine self-esteem and belonging, further affecting retention. Overall, Maslow's framework highlights the importance of addressing both basic and social-emotional needs to support male students' educational success.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive survey design to explore how cultural practices affect male student retention in public secondary schools. A sample of 15 principals, 30 class teachers, 456 students, and 45 parents was drawn from a target population of 1,368 using stratified and simple random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interview schedules, and analyzed using SPSS version 27.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to assess the effects of peer pressure on male students' retention in public secondary schools in Mbooni West Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya.

Respondents' Background Information

In this study 486 questionnaires were administered to class teachers and students and 60 interview schedules were administered to principals and parents as shown in the table 2.

Table 2: Responses rates

Respondents	Sample Size	Number Returned	Return Rate (%)
Students	456	438	96.1
Parents	45	45	100.0
Class Teachers	30	27	90.0
Principals	15	13	86.7

From Table 2 the overall response rate was established to be 95.8% which is quite high. Many studies accept a range of 50-60% response rates as adequate for analysis and reporting while a few do not (Bailey, 2008; Mugenda &Mugenda, 2013). Further, Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) classify a response rate of 50% as adequate, of 60% as good and above 70 % as excellent.

Influence of Peer Pressure on Male Student Retention

The study sought to establish how peer pressure influence the male student retention in public secondary school shown in the tables below.

Table 3: Students' Responses on the Influence of Peer Pressure on Male Student Retention

	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Peer Pressure Factor										
Boys engage into drugs and substances abuse due to peer pressure.	241	55.0	152	34.7	5	1.1	13	3.0	27	6.2
Students who use drug and substance abuse drop out of school	176	40.2	152	34.7	37	8.4	39	8.9	34	7.8
There are people who come around the school fence to sell drugs	125	28.5	104	23.7	125	28.5	43	9.8	41	9.4
Few of the boys carry drugs to school to share with their peers	71	16.2	64	14.6	52	11.9	134	30.6	117	26.7
Peer pressure has influenced change of attitude of the boys.	209	47.7	157	35.8	23	5.3	28	6.4	21	4.8
Change of attitude towards schooling makes the boys to dropout.	159	35.5	189	43.2	29	6.6	32	7.3	31	7.1

N=438

Table 4: Teachers' Responses on the Influence of Peer Pressure on Male Student Retention

	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Peer Pressure Factor										
There are signs of school boys getting influenced by drugs	15	55.6	11	40.7	0	0	1	3.7	0	0
The peer pressure hinders the boys from completing school	10	37.0	14	51.9	1	3.7	2	7.4	0	0
Boys who use drugs and substance abuse they do not concentrate in class	16	59.3	7	25.9	3	11.1	1	3.7	0	0
In the school there are boys who use drug and substance abuse.	16	59.3	8	29.6	2	7.4	1	3.7	0	0
Some school neighbors' they sell drug and substance abuse.	5	18.5	14	51.9	6	22.2	1	3.7	1	3.7
Peer pressure influences boys to change their attitude towards learning.	14	51.9	11	40.7	0	0	2	7.4	0	0

N=27

Table 5: Parents' Responses on the Influence of Peer Pressure on Male Student Retention

	YES		NO	
	F	%	F	%
Peer Pressure Factor				
Do boys help you in household chores?	46	100	0	0
Some boys have involved themselves with drug and substance abuse?	46	100	0	0
Peer pressure can lead to drop out of school	45	97.8	1	2.2
Attitude change can be influenced by the peer pressure	29	63	17	37

N=46

Table 6: Principals' Responses on the Influence of Peer Pressure on Male Student Retention

Peer Pressure Factor	YES		NO	
	F	%	F	%
Do use of drugs and substance abuse affect learner's retention?	13	100	0	0
In your school do you have boys who drop out of school due to drugs?	13	100	0	0
Have you identified some boys who use drugs in your school?	12	92.3	1	7.7
Can peer pressure lead to change in attitude?	13	100	0	0
Have you identified some outsiders who sell drugs and substances to your boys?	8	61.5	5	38.5

According to Table 3, 89.7% of students agreed that peer pressure leads male students into drug and substance abuse, a finding supported by teachers (78.9%), parents (100%), and principals (100%). The majority of students (74.9%) also linked drug use to school dropout, while 82.5% believed peer pressure negatively influences attitudes toward education—an observation echoed by all principals. Teachers (96.3%) reported signs of drug use among male students, and 85.2% confirmed its impact on retention. While 51.2% of students believed drugs were supplied through school fences, 57.3% expressed doubt or uncertainty, indicating possible fear or lack of awareness. Teachers appeared more aware than principals of external threats, with 70.4% acknowledging drug sales by neighbors compared to 61.5% of principals. These findings highlight peer pressure, drug abuse, and inconsistent stakeholder awareness as key barriers to male student retention, emphasizing the need for better communication, supervision, and support systems within schools and communities.

Table 7: Correlation between Peer Pressure and Male Student Retention

		Students		Parents		Teachers		Principals	
		IPP	MSR	IPP	MSR	IPP	MSR	IPP	MCR
IPP	Pearson Correlation	1	-.217**	1	.031	1	-.204	1	-.195
	Sig – 2- tailed		.000		.840		.309		.523
	N	438	438	46	46	27	27	13	13
MSR	Pearson Correlation	-.217**	1	.031	1	-.204	1	-.195	1
	Sig – 2- tailed	.000		.840		.309		.523	
	N	438	438	46	46	27	27	13	13

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Student responses showed a statistically significant weak negative correlation between peer pressure and male student retention ($r = -.217^{**}$, $p = .000$), indicating that increased peer pressure is linked to higher dropout rates among boys. This finding aligns with Mola (2019), who reported a similar negative relationship. However, data from teachers, parents, and principals did not show statistically significant correlations, suggesting that these groups may underestimate the impact of peer pressure. This contrast highlights students' deeper awareness of peer dynamics, likely due to their direct experiences. Overall, the findings confirm that peer pressure—manifesting through drug abuse and shifting attitudes—negatively affects retention, with drugs reportedly entering schools through covert means, including via the school fence.

CONCLUSION

The study found that specific aspects of peer pressure—particularly drug abuse and negative attitudes toward education—significantly affect male student retention. Many boys drop out after engaging in substance use, following peers into income-generating activities, or adopting anti-school attitudes. Peer influence also contributes to risky behaviors such as alcohol abuse, crime, and early sexual activity. The findings indicate a link between school dropout and increased crime rates, as boys with lower educational attainment are more likely to engage in criminal behavior. In contrast, those who complete secondary education are less likely to participate in such activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many schools lack a standardized guidance and counseling framework, as well as trained personnel to address the issue of peer pressure among male students. Schools should therefore engage guest speakers to mentor and guide students on how to positively navigate peer influence. In addition, legislation should be enacted and strictly enforced to combat drug and substance abuse in schools, with appropriate sanctions for those who violate the rules. The Ministry of Education should coordinate with Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs), local administrators, and other educational stakeholders to build the capacity of school managers, teachers, and parents. This can be achieved through seminars, workshops, and community forums, which emphasize the importance of providing guidance to male students on resisting negative peer influence.

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