

Understanding the Barriers to Female Education in Ghana

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Abstract

This research examines the obstacles young female students face while enrolled in public school in Ghana, particularly during the critical transition from junior high school to senior high school. The research involved quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data. Three main obstacles emerged from the data: poverty, harassment, and a cultural mindset that devalues female education. This themes are analyzed in length, and program recommendations to alleviate these barriers are provided at the end.

1 Introduction

Education, which produces human capital for a nation, is a crucial step in overcoming poverty and raising the standard of living. In

Ghana, however, there is a marked difference between the enrollment rates between males and females. Although the Ghanaian government has worked hard to overcome the gender gap in the formal educational system, there is still much work to be done.

There are many barriers to female education, “yet educating girls proves to be the most cost-effective measure a developing country can take to improve its standard of living.” [3] Educating females has been shown to reduce fertility rates of females and to delay when they begin childbearing.

In addition, more educated females seek earlier prenatal care when they are pregnant, which lowers maternal mortality [10]. The economic benefits of educating females are enormous. Without education, half of the populations labor and intellect remains untapped and thus, the country is only making half of the GDP that it could be. Studies have shown that when females earn money, that

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money is more likely to be put into savings, into the community, into education, or into a family's well being and health than when that same amount of money is earned by a male [6]. Thus, females choice of spending tends to be more beneficial for the family, community, and country as a whole.

Ghanaian governmental effort to reform the education system began with the Education Act of 1961. This act declared primary education compulsory and free, and deemed that any parent not sending their child to school could be fined [7]. Although school was now technically free, students were still required to pay a registration fee and to buy their own books, uniform, and supplies. The act did, however, dramatically increase enrollment rates. Enrollment in primary school more than doubled between 1960/1 and 1964/5 [7]. The gender gap decreased in primary school years, changing from 36.16% of primary students being female in 1960 to 44.43% in 1968. The gender gap remained large in secondary schools, with 22.04% of secondary students being female in 1960 to 25.88% of secondary students being female in 1968.

Unfortunately, the 1970s and 1980s saw the decline of Ghanas education system due to political instability and corruption [5]. The new Constitution of 1992 represented a monumental change when it declared that each child has a right to free, compulsory primary education. This change opened up education to more students, especially students from poor, rural communities [3]. However again, the funding did not cover books, pens, supplies, or uniforms, so buying the items con-

tinue to be a problem for impoverished children and inhibits enrollment.

The specific needs of female students came into focus in 1997 with the formation of the Girls Education Unit. Since its inception, the GEU has worked to create female scholarships for promising students, revised textbooks to be more gender-sensitive, trained women on income-generating activities, created a Girls Education Week, put on Empowerment camps, and focused on partnerships with the private sector to meet the needs of female students. To address the continuing problem of low female enrollment in higher education, GEU created an action plan that includes steps such as promoting female role models, improving the safety of schools, building female sanitary units, educating boys and men about how to treat women, improving reproductive health knowledge, providing food programs, providing incentives for female teachers, ensuring school schedules are flexible enough for the child to still do labor for their family, mobilizing the community towards an attitude change on female education, and ensuring that schools are cost-effective and affordable for students [3].

These steps come out of the knowledge of several barriers to female education. The first is cost. Although school is technically free, uniforms, school lunch, textbooks, supplies, registration fees, and transportation can be too expensive for some families. If the family cannot afford to educate all of their children, preference often goes to boys. One way the government is alleviating the financial burden of education is by providing free lunches dur-

ing school through the School Feeding Programme, thus saving the family money on food costs, and giving the children incentives to attend school. This program, while very helpful in increasing enrollment, only goes to the most impoverished districts, so more effort needs to be done in this area.

Cultural predispositions towards gender inequality is a strong hindrance to female education. Traditional Ghanaian culture doesn't always have a positive view on females who advance into higher educational levels, especially in the rural northern Islamic areas [4]. These communities focus on a subservient role for women, and discourage higher career pursuits for them. One way to change this attitude is by emphasizing the practical value of female education, such as the improved economic stability and increased family income with two working adults. By emphasizing the practical value of female education, the culture may gradually accept females as a vital half of the economy.

Early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS also have a detrimental effect on female education, particularly for higher levels of education. Often families will arrange a marriage for their daughter while she is still in her teenage years, and thus, interrupt her educational path [12]. The daughter may also become pregnant early; according to UNICEF, only 20% of the population uses contraceptives, leading to many unwanted early pregnancies [11]. Finally, sexual health information is not widely accessible, and the lack of contraceptive use leads to a high level of HIV/AIDS, which reaches a peak in rural northern Ghana of 7.4% of the

population [11]. Better education on sexual health information, increased access to contraceptives, and discouraging early marriage would help alleviate this barrier.

Other concerns that female students face are issues of safety and fair treatment in the classroom. Sexual harassment is rampant in the classrooms as well as over sexist bias from teachers. Training teachers and students to be gender-sensitive would help. Establishing Girls Clubs, as some schools do, would also be beneficial to raising the self-esteem of female students and decreasing harassment. Empowerment Camps or groups may help, and prosecuting the perpetrators continues to be a focus for the government. GEU holds an annual Empowerment Camp for 250 of the country's brightest female students where the girls learn about self-esteem and leadership skills. This approach has proven to be successful in raising self-esteem and renewing the girls' commitment to their education [4].

Sanitation can be a problem too, especially as female students begin menstruation. Often schools lack separate male and female bathrooms, which leads some female students to stay home during their menstrual period and miss important class time [6]. Funding for proper bathrooms would help give female students privacy and ensure their comfort in school while going through difficult changes. Greater access to sanitary napkins for school-aged females would also help, as many females cannot afford sanitary napkins.

This research looks at the factors affecting females' decisions about attending secondary schooling, with a particular focus on the transition time between junior secondary school

and senior secondary school. This is an important transition point because as many as 7 out of 10 of females who graduate junior high school never make it to senior high school. The factors analyzed include: cultural influences, financial barriers, safety concerns, future career goals, self-esteem, and practical hindrances. After analyzing these barriers, the research proposes several program recommendations designed to increase enrollment in senior secondary schooling and improve female students attendance, retention, and achievement in that schooling.

2 Method

Meeting with Officials The research was conducted in the rural central region of Ghana, as the map to the left illustrates. Conducting the research involved three parts. The first part includes talking to government officials in charge of education, and in particular officials from the Girls Educational Unit. The first meeting was with the Minister of Education for the District of Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie, Grace Eduapta. She gave permission to interview any students necessary, and offered to alert the headteachers that research may be done at their schools in the coming weeks.

After that meeting with Mrs. Eduapta, the researcher met with the District Girl Child Education Coordinator, Lydia Nana Aba Bentil, who gave an interesting and informative viewpoint on some of the reasons for low female enrollment rates in school. The governments official statistics on education

came from the Statistics Office at the district headquarters, including BECE pass rates, enrollment rates, and population size. In Accra, the researcher met with the Deputy Minister of Tertiary Education, Beatrice A. Obro, who provided the governments stance on education and goals for the future. The final interview was with Elvis Morris Donkoh, Constituency Youth Leader for the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie district. Elvis works directly with local students and children through his non-profit organization, Alliance for Youth Development. He had invaluable information on girls education after his extensive experience with local youth.



Figure 1: Map of Ghana. Red star indicates location in which research was conducted. Picture source CIA.gov.

Surveys In order to gain quantitative data, the second part of the research involved survey collection. 195 primary students (67 males, 128 females) were surveyed, with grades 2-6 represented. Examples of questions asked in the survey included whether they had plans to attend junior secondary school, senior secondary schools, and university, as well as their future career goals and their favorite subject. They were also asked if they had brothers or sisters attending secondary school. A copy of all of the surveys used in this research can be found at the back of the paper. Four schools contributed to the data; two in Moree, one in Yamoransa, and one in Asebu. Ten students were selected from each grade and assembled into one room. A translator went over the survey with the students, explaining the survey questions in their local language, Fante. Teachers walked around to help students who didn't understand.

Junior secondary students were surveyed with a more comprehensive questionnaire that covered problems encountered in schools, what would help them attend senior secondary school, future career goals, motives for attending school, parents' attitude towards their education, and their desire to attend senior high school and/or university. 130 JHS students (69 females, 61 males) were surveyed, over four different schools, two in Moree, one in Yamoransa, one in Asebu. The junior secondary students were pooled from the same campus as the primary students, as most junior secondary schools are attached to a primary school. The locations were chosen to represent a sample of the district, so a vari-

ety of public religious schools (the most common type of public school) and public secular schools were included. The students also had a translator explain the questions in Fante.

Teachers were surveyed about their attitudes towards their students. Eight teachers were surveyed, 6 males and 2 females. The teachers were asked who the top five students in their class are, in order to determine if they tended to put more males than females, as the literature research suggests may be the case. They were also asked what percentage of their students will go on to secondary school, and what secondary schooling prepares boys for and what it prepares girls for. Finally, they were asked what would be most beneficial for their students in order to encourage them to continue their education.

Interviews The third part of the research involved a one-on-one discussion with senior secondary students about their educational goals, obstacles they face in the educational system, and what they believe can be done to encourage more girls to attend senior secondary school. These videotaped interviews may be accessed by e-mailing mdlamber@usc.edu, and a summary is provided in the results section.

These case studies came from students currently enrolled in senior secondary school since these are the subjects most directly involved with the transition to senior secondary school, and the ones that will be most likely able to understand English.

The students were asked what their career aspirations are, and their future edu-

cational goals. They were asked what obstacles they overcame to attend secondary school, and what they believe can be done to help other students attend secondary school. Other questions involved the environment of the school, including safety concerns, sanitation, and supplies available.

These interviews were reviewed and coded for similar ideas that emerged, in the hopes of gaining a cohesive and comprehensive picture of the obstacles facing female post-primary education.

3 Results

While the situation facing female students in Ghana is enormously complex with many intertwining factors to consider, three main themes emerged in nearly every interview, in the survey results, and in meeting with the officials. The first theme is poverty; students frequently cited lack of money as a hindrance to continuing their education. The second theme is that female students often undergo uncomfortable harassment from their male peers and teachers, which creates an unwelcome environment at school, and discourages the girls from attending. The last theme is a pervasive mindset in Ghanaian culture that undermines the value of female education and of women in general.

Poverty The most overriding obstacle to higher female education is the widespread poverty in Ghana. Of junior high school students surveyed, 85.4% of students cited that not having enough money for school supplies

or uniforms as a problem for them. A quarter of the students said that they often go to school hungry. When looked at with all financial concerns combined, nearly 100% of students admitted some financial problems.

Although school is officially free for every child, in practice, schools still charge expensive registration fees. On top of that, every child must buy a uniform and have purchased all of the necessary books, pens, and supplies for school. If they are missing any supplies or their uniform, they will be sternly disciplined and sent home. Children who can't afford supplies or a uniform often stay home to avoid the shame of being sent home from school. The average family in the Central Region spends 160 cedi (about 109 USD at current rates) per year sending their child to public school. For a junior high school student, half of that cost goes straight to school registration fees and the other half is divided between uniforms, pens, books, and transportation [2].

In addition to these expenses, the family must take into account the lost revenue from sending a child to school instead of having her or she work on the farm or sell items in town, as many children do. When surveyed, 39.2% of JHS students reported that their parents would rather have them earn money for their family than go to school. Children are also expected to look after their younger siblings, so sending an older child to school means one less caretaker for the family. 16.92% of JHS students say that their parents would rather that they stay home to take care of their family than attend school. Most parents would like to see their children educated, but the

Problems Facing Students

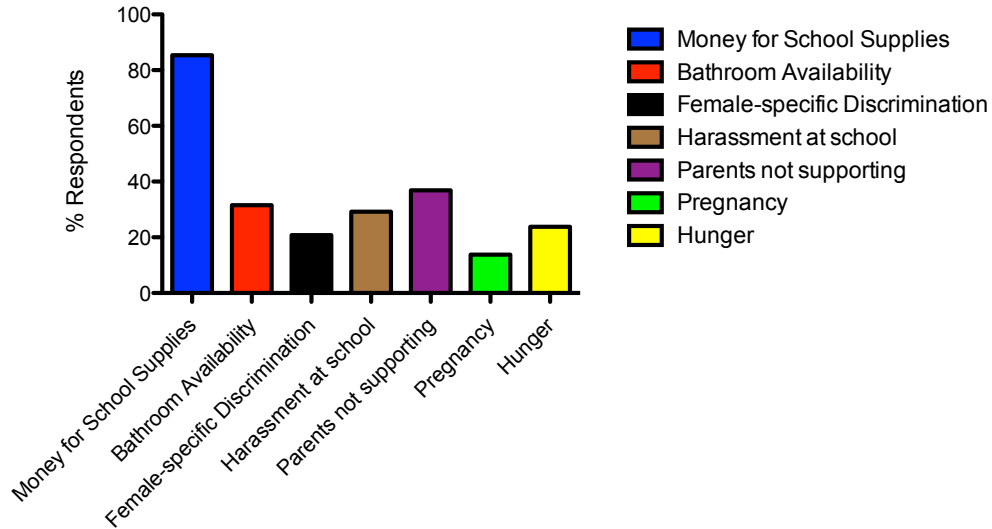


Figure 2: Results of JHS student responses to being asked what types of problems they faced most with regards to their life and participation in school. The most frequent response was not enough money for supplies, uniforms.

practical cost of school, lost revenue, and loss of familial caretakers makes sending the child to school an expensive option for many families, especially in the poor Central Region. One child wrote in the bottom of his survey, “My parents want me to go to school, but they dont have money to look after me.” This is a common theme in the surveys a desire to attend school, but not enough money to make it a viable option.

As expected, the most frequently mentioned type of assistance needed was financial. When asked to choose up to three types of assistance that the student needs the most, 47.7% of JHS students need money for tuition, 42.3% needed free supplies, 13.1% need free uniforms, and 16.9% need free food.

Students are lacking basics such as pens and paper, and often have to go to school hungry. The next most common assistance

requested is academic assistance such as BECE prep classes and extra classes, which are resources that students from wealthier families can afford and frequently utilize to further their education. Not being able to afford basics like pens and supplies, as well as luxuries like tutoring and extra classes, put students from poor, rural families at a distinct disadvantage to their wealthier, urban peers when it comes time to apply to senior high school.

Students do receive some financial assistance from the government and from NGOs. The Ghanaian government created the Capitation Grant program in 2004, which gives schools 4 cedi, 50 pesewa (about \$3.08) per student per term to be spent on school supplies and books. The idea was to supplement the free education and to increase access for families who struggle to afford books and pens. In reality, however, the central government often cannot send the Capitation Grants to the districts for months because lack of funds. For example, in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie district, the regional district hasnt received any Capitation Grants in over 6 months [1].

When the schools do receive the money, they usually need it to repair the schools infrastructure such as building a new roof or purchasing desks. The original goal of using the money to buy supplies for students in need is not often the reality.

NGOs are currently working to help impoverished students. The number one aid is free books and supplies, with free uniforms in second. The students that receive this assistance benefit greatly, but many students dont

receive any assistance. There are also some NGOs that offer scholarships to promising female students so that they can attend senior high school. For a girl that receives this scholarship, the benefit is life-changing. Currently, however, there are not nearly enough scholarships for all of the promising female students.

Although primary and junior high school is supposed to be free and compulsory for every student, that dream is not achieved. In the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie district, for example, there are 120,000 school-aged children living in the community, but only 30,000 in school [2]. That means that only one in four eligible children are attending school; the rest are selling produce, taking care of family members, or playing on the streets. Many families simply cannot afford to feed and clothe their children, let alone spend money on books and registration fees.

The problem intensifies in senior high school, because the school charges tuition for attendance, in addition to books, supplies, uniforms. In addition, many students attend senior high school far from home, so they must pay for room and board at the school as well. The average cost of senior high school, including room and board, is 500 cedi a term, or 1,500 cedi a year (1,027 USD) [8], while the average Ghanaian makes only 150 cedi a year. Thus, senior high school is an elusive dream for many Ghanaians, a practical option only for the wealthiest sector of society. Scholarships help bridge the gap and increase access for students from lower income families, but many more scholarships are needed to create an equal access educational system, and break the cycle of poverty.

What would be most helpful so you can attend Senior High School?

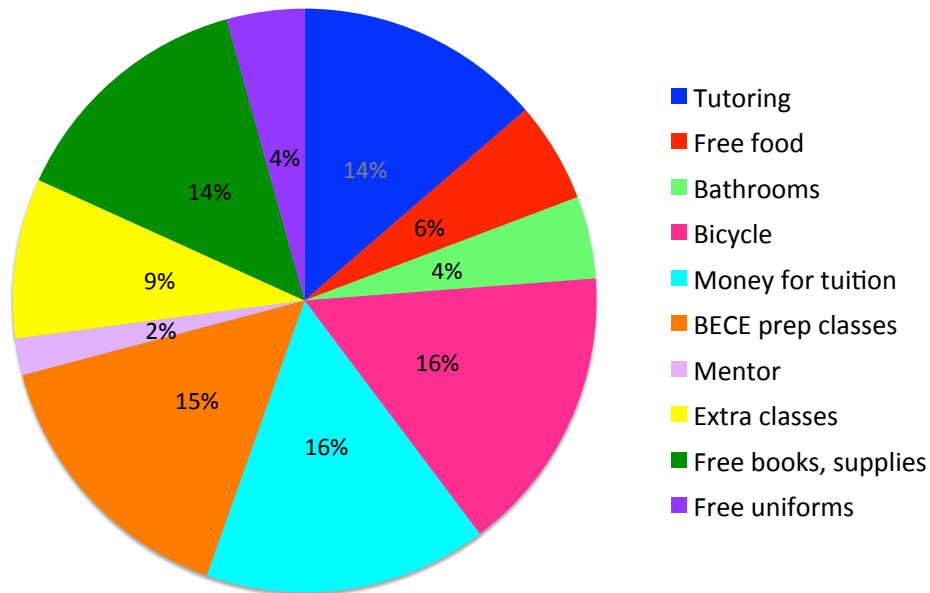


Figure 3: Results of students asked “What would be most helpful so you can attend Senior High School?” Students are lacking basics such as pens and paper, and often have to go to school.

Harassment Harassment and discrimination, both from male peers and from teachers, is a problem for female students. Discrimination from teachers is common in the classroom. When the researcher asked teachers who their top five students are, the teachers named more than twice as many male students as female students. Teachers who believe that their male students are brighter will in turn pay extra attention to those students,

and the male students will receive an unfair advantage in the classroom.

In addition to subtle discrimination against females, some teachers use overt physical harassment such as a small whip-like piece of wood or a cane. The teachers use these if a student receives a low score on a test or speaks out of turn in class or misbehaves. Some female students report bruising and bleeding after being corporally punished by a

teacher. Several students said that they were afraid to attend school because of the beatings, and that they believe the beatings may frighten students into staying home. One student interviewed told the story of her younger sister who was frequently caned, and because of it, wanted to stop going to school all together.

I saw this beating firsthand while I was conducting surveys. Several students gathered by the windows to watch what I was doing in the classroom. A teacher came out with a stick and started hitting the children away from the windows. They went running trying to escape, and she smacked the slower children repeatedly.

Evidence of a precarious environment in and around the schools also came out in the surveys, as many students report feeling like school is unsafe. In the junior high school surveys, 45.3% of students say that they sometimes feel unsafe on the way to school or while at school, and 18.5% of students say that they often feel unsafe, an alarming statistic. Only a third of students say that they never feel unsafe at or on their way to school.

When asked in the interviews, most of the safety concerns arise from harassment from other students and teachers. The long walk to school brings concern for safety, as well as corporal punishment from teachers. There was no gender difference in how safe the students felt in school.

A safety concern for female students in particular, comes from their male peers who frequently tease and taunt the girls. In junior high school, the students reported that the teasing is usually in the classroom after a girl

says the wrong answer. In senior high school, when the ratio of boys to girls surpasses 2-to-1, the teasing escalates into threats, intimidation, and harassment. The female students from Asuansi Technical School, where there are 81 female students to 1,100 male students, reported the most intense harassment. The female students say the male students tell them that they are not wanted there, that they are ugly, stupid, and bad girls.

Female students from both Asuansi Technical Institute and Aggrey Memorial Zion Senior High School say that they avoid the dining halls for fear of harassment, and sometimes choose to go hungry instead of listen to the boys yell at them. One shy student admitted she got stomach ulcers because of the stress from all of the harassment. She said that she avoided the dining halls for fear of being teased, and thus, she was not eating enough. When asked if the teachers step in to stop the harassment, the girls laughed. They said that teachers sometimes give boys a warning, but the boys are not punished and nothing changes. They seemed to accept the harassment as part of life, and one student said defeatedly, Its a way of life, a tradition.

Male students in senior high school occasionally will use sexuality to harass female students. One student said that a boy will ask you to be his girlfriend (they explain that this is sometimes a euphemism for sexual relations, and not an actual relationship), and if you refuse he will taunt you in front of his friends and spread rumors about you. They said that the boys want to intimidate you, they want you to feel so inferior. The boys, when rejected, become quite aggressive to the

How safe do you feel?

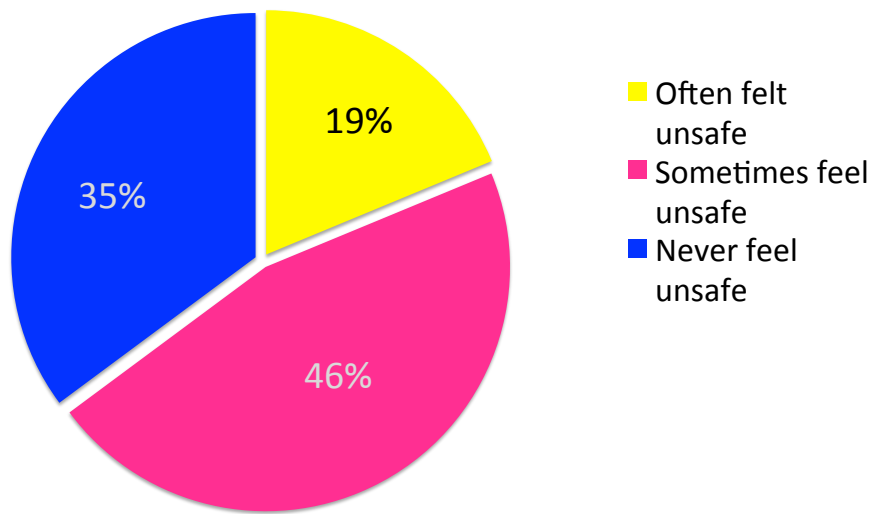


Figure 4: Results from female students who were asked about feeling safe on the way to and at school.

girls, with verbal harassment and bullying. The girls believed that they were too young to have boyfriends and said they tried to ignore when boys pushed them into romantic situations. They all said that they wanted to wait and to focus on their education in the time being, but that the boys made them feel very uncomfortable.

Luckily, sexual harassment seemed to be coming from mostly male peers, and this research did not uncover cases of sexual ha-

arrassment from teachers, as the literature suggested. When asked if teachers ever behave inappropriately towards their female students, the girls looked a bit confused and said they hadn't heard of anything like that. They said teachers act like your family away from home, treating you as if you were their children. The girls all reported feeling close to the teachers, and being able to confide in them about problems they had. They did say, however, that if something inappropriate had

happened with a teacher and a student, that the student probably wouldn't say anything, and it would go unnoticed.

Harassment seems to be a pervasive problem throughout education, and while it may not outright stop girls from attending school, it does discourage them. After continually being harassed, some girls admitted that they felt like giving up and leaving school. Harassment makes school feel unsafe for the female students, and inhibits an open learning environment. There must be a greater emphasis on safety while in school, and teachers need to be trained in how to handle disputes between students. Teachers must learn what is acceptable behavior in their students and what is not acceptable such as insults and bullying. They need to learn how to properly and effectively punish students who cross the line. In addition, alternative forms of punishment, such as withdrawing privileges and detention, should be used instead of corporal punishment. Also, an emphasis on positive reinforcement would help to make the classroom environment a more inviting place to learn.

Cultural Mindset The most complex and important factor to look at when studying female education is the cultural mindset surrounding female education. The mentality towards women is changing, but there is still strong, pervasive sexism in Ghana. Men have a sense of entitlement and superiority, while many women lack self-esteem or believe that they can accomplish much. Nowhere does this mentality come out more strongly than

in the educational system.

When faced with sending their sons or with sending their daughters to school, parents will choose the sons. As Amastacia Kusi-Yeboah from Holy Child Senior High School put it:

“[Parents] believe that it is much more reasonable to send your male child to school. Even if your female child goes to school, she will get married, have kids, and work in the kitchen. They don't seem to realize that there are women in Ghana who are making it.”

Parents believe that an educated son will be able to provide for his family, but an educated daughter will become a mother and wife anyway, regardless of her schooling.

The officials I met with echoed this sentiment. Elvis Morris Donkoh, Constituency Youth Leader for the district, said, People in the community do not see the importance of female education. Educating the girl-child is not a priority. Those in the community need to be sensitized about the importance of educating the girl-child. He explained that if a family has a boy and a girl, but can only afford to help one further their education, they will always choose the boy, even if the girl is a better student. The boy needs an education to get a good job to support his future wife, while the girl will just inevitably become someone's wife and mother.

Sometimes, teachers also have this mentality. One student explained to me that if both a boy and a girl are not doing well in

school, the teacher might suggest that the girl drop out of school. To the boy, the teacher would encourage him to study harder and to continue his education. The students also explained that the discrimination continues past senior high school. In University it is common for a lecturer to ask female students for sexual favors in order to get a good grade. After graduating university, females are sometimes expected to perform sexual favors for male managers in order to get the jobs they want. The girls giggled and said there is a common saying, Use what you have to get what you want meaning use your body to attain the job you want. The culture accepts that it is harder for a female to achieve and encourages using whatever means necessary, even if the means are degrading and objectifying. The girls explained that this attitude is very common in Ghana and were surprised to hear that its illegal to do the same in America.

The stereotype against women is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it means that fewer females have an opportunity to be educated, because their families and communities are less likely to support them. But it also means that the girls that do have the opportunity to be educated work very hard to prove themselves. The female students at Aggrey Memorial Zion High School explained to me that females are always at the top for test scores, that it is standard to be all females at the top. If there is a male at the top, it is shocking. They also explained that females take their studies to heart, like they would a baby. Nana Aba Fumibla Aikins from Aggrey Memorial Zion Senior High School says,

The way we cherish our babies, that is how we cherish whatever comes to us to do. That is how we treat our education, like our babies. That is what makes us excel more than the males. The female students in the interview all agreed that they dont take their education for granted. They dont want to fool around; they want to work hard and learn as much as they can.

While I was surveying the students, I noticed that often the female students would sit at the front of the classroom, silently absorbing all of the instructions and eagerly filling out the survey. Meanwhile the male students would be laughing and cracking jokes in the back. The female students seem to know they have something to prove to themselves and to the communities, and are determined to work hard to do that.

There is hope however. Mr. Donkoh gave me a saying hes heard, If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate a society. He explained that an educated women will see the importance of helping others become educated, and work to give back to her community. At Holy Child Senior High School, there is a similar saying at the entrance: Educate a women, educate a nation. There are campaigns to emphasize female education, and a special unit in the government devoted to female education. This is a good start. But as this research shows, there is much to be done still.

Other Factors Besides the three largest problems uncovered in this research, there are many other issues facing female education.

One is the lack of proper sanitation facilities. Deputy Minister of Tertiary Education, Beatrice A. Obro, explained that the lack of separate bathrooms cause many girls to feel uncomfortable going to the bathroom, and may make the girls not want to go to school. Elvis Morris Donkoh expanded on this by explaining that without separate bathrooms and proper sanitation, the girls feel embarrassed during their menstruation and are often harshly teased by the boys. Many girls stay home during menstruation for fear of harassment, and thus miss important class time. Clean, separate bathrooms are needed to avoid these problems.

Another issue raised in this research is the difficulty students face reaching school. Of junior high school students surveyed, 51.5% of students said that it is very difficult to get to school. Most students cannot afford to take the bus and very few families have cars. In the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie district, 91.5% of students walk to school each morning [2]. The walk can be a strenuous one, especially in the heat and humidity, and may discourage students from attending school. When asked what kind of assistance would help more students attend school, 48.5% said having a bicycle would help.

Teenage pregnancy remains a problem for female education, especially in the poorest communities such as Moree, where one student explained that it is so common to get pregnant as a teenager, that if you don't, people may think that you are infertile. One student at Asuansi Technical Institute told the story of her sister who had to drop out of school because she was pregnant, and she

now has two children at the age of seventeen. The survey results show that 13.8% of the students have been pregnant, but this may be a problem with translation, as some male students circled pregnancy as well. More research should be done to look into how prevalent pregnancy is in school. Girls are frequently told to just say no to boys, but they are not giving accurate health information or access to contraceptives. Condoms and birth control are expensive luxuries to many families, and even if the girls can afford them, they often do not have correct information on how to use them [9]. To add to the problem, boys are not told to avoid sexual contact with girls or how to use contraceptives — the problem of avoiding pregnancy and STIs is laid heavily on the girls' shoulders.

Early marriage is decreasing in the Central region, especially with laws making marriage to a girl under the age of 16 illegal. Although this research did not uncover examples of early marriage, we heard that early marriage remains a problem in the more conservative northern regions of Ghana. Indeed, Fatima Anafu, a woman who owns a NGO in northern Ghanaian to help female students, remarked that early marriage remains a huge problem in the north, with girls as young as nine being married off. She said most girls marry around age 15 in the area that she works. This is a factor that further research could look at.

In summary, while poverty, harassment, and a cultural mindset against female education remain the largest problems facing female students, there are also issues of transportation, proper sanitation, teenage preg-

Transportation To School

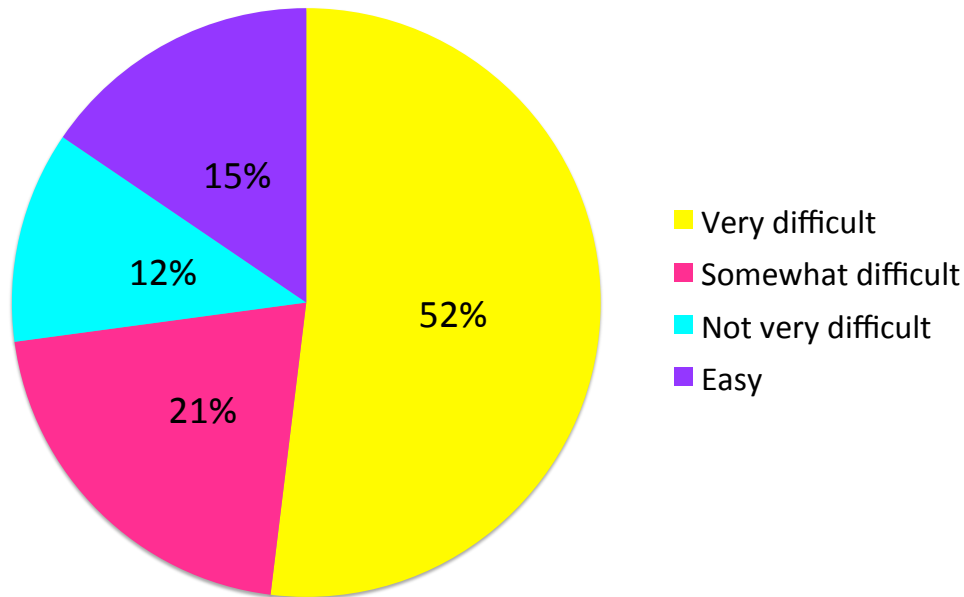


Figure 5: Results from female students who were asked about ease of transport to and from school.

nancy, and early marriage that need to be examined further.

4 Discussion

For the insights that this research gathered, it has barely scratched the surface of the complex topic of female education. Female education in Ghana is a multifaceted situation with many different areas that merit atten-

tion. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy may be an especially potent area for further research, as it seems to be a large problem that is mainly underground and secretive. Future research could also compare the regions in Ghana, since this research focused mainly on the Central Region, and in particular, the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie district. The Northern Region, a notoriously impoverished area, or the Greater Accra Region, a more affluent, urban environment,

may yield very different results from the primarily agricultural Central Region. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine what factors cause these differences.

Research specifically looking at the effectiveness of various NGO aid on female education would be beneficial. Looking solely at different approaches that NGOs take could be very helpful to uncover what problems future NGOs could avoid. Creating an effective and beneficial NGO is a very complex, difficult task, so research looking at what current NGOs are doing would be advantageous.

Some of the pitfalls of this research involved a narrow scope, translation difficulties, and lack of time. Although over 600 students were surveyed and 30 students interviewed, all of the students came from the same district, which may bias results, or narrow the external validity to the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankesie district. In addition, while every effort was made to ensure a representative sample of public schools, including Methodist, Catholic, and secular schools, the results may still be skewed because only a handful of schools could be included in the survey due to time restraints.

The language barrier posed a larger problem than originally anticipated. Many younger students do not speak English, despite English being the official language, so a translator communicated with the primary and junior secondary students. The same translator worked with every school the researcher went to in order to increase internal validity by decreasing variability caused by different translators.

The survey was carefully written in simple,

clear English and it was also translated verbally into Fante, but some students may still have had difficulty understanding the questions. In the future, it may be the most beneficial to focus on interview-style research with community members and students that spoke English well, in order to pick up on subtleties that a survey may miss. The senior high school student interviews were conducted in English, so miscommunication is likely to be less for these, but there is always room for concepts to be lost in translation.

4.1 Recommendations for NGOs

NGO assistance has the potential to change lives of Ghanaian girls, and have a profound impact, if done correctly. One of the most important issues for an NGO to consider is what the community needs, and to listen attentively to the members of the community before developing with an aid plan. Elvis Morris Donkoh cited potent examples of NGOs that failed because the organization didn't listen to what the community needed first; they came in with what they thought the community needed without first asking the community members. The first place to start, as an NGO, is by listening, and studying the setting for the NGO project. Only through that process can an NGO have a successful impact. That being said, there are several clear ways that NGOs can help increase rates of females in secondary education.

Provide free school supplies When asked what the students needed the most, the majority of students said school supplies. This is especially true when it comes to female education, because if the family can only afford one child's school supplies, preference will go to sons over daughters. NGOs providing free paper, pens, books, and other tools will be enormously helping the students, at a relatively low cost to themselves. For families making the average of 150 cedi a year, or 12.5 cedi a month (8.56 USD), a few cedi can go a very long way. It may be best for NGOs to give the students the actual supplies instead of money, because the family may take the money to use for other expenses such as food or clothes. Giving tangible items to the students would ensure that these supplies went where they were supposed to, and allowed the students to attend school without fear of being sent home. In the same vein, purchasing uniforms for the students would be of great benefit. Without a uniform, students are forbidden from attending school, so owning a uniform is a crucial pre-requisite for enrolling in the educational system. Providing female students with free school supplies is a concrete, tangible, and relatively low-cost route to increasing enrollment in school.

Providing scholarships One of the most cherished ideas in the Western world is the American dream, the idea that with enough hard work, anything is possible. For poor, but bright girls in Ghana, though, that dream is not possible without scholarships. Even if the girl works hard in school, manages to get

school supplies and uniforms, and passes the Basic Entrance Certification Exam (a highly competitive prerequisite for high school), if she cannot afford to pay for senior high school, she cannot hope to continue her education. Currently there are not enough scholarships available for the brightest girls, so it is inevitable that some girls will be denied access to senior high school, simply because they can't afford the cost of tuition. Scholarships, especially scholarships to senior high school, would be life changing to these girls.

Funding education for the brightest and most promising girls is a sure way to not only change that girl's life, but also to create female role models for other girls in the community. When one girl becomes educated, she has the potential to return to her community and mobilize change there, thus beginning a cycle. After providing a girl with a scholarship to attend senior high school, it may be a good idea to ask in return that she provide free tutoring or mentoring services to younger female students in the community. In this way, she can give back to her community by helping other female students achieve as well, and provide a positive role model to younger girls.

Awareness Campaign Changing a cultural mindset is difficult and slow, but in the case of Ghana's pervasive sexism, necessary for progress. A social campaign to emphasize the importance of educating females would be helpful in changing this mindset. This campaign should come from the government and local governments, and be funded with money from the Girls Education Unit.

The campaign should focus on informing the community about the practical and significant benefits of educating female daughters, such as the increased economic output that a family receives with two working parents. The campaign should point out specific examples of Ghanaian women who have excelled, particularly in male dominated areas like medicine and engineering. By giving examples of positive role models, more young girls will be encouraged to continue their education, and parents will believe in the importance in sending their daughters to school.

Currently the Girls Education Unit, in conjunction with European Aid funding, has a campaign to promote education, but the scale of the campaign is limited, and focused on discouraging teenage pregnancy in favor of education. The campaign needs to expand beyond teenage pregnancy, and focus on the potential young girls have, working to empower them not only to avoid pregnancy but to aim high and work for those goals. The campaign can include tangible items such as pamphlets, posters, and billboards, as well as a more community-based approach by educating village chiefs on how to spread the message of the importance of female education.

While it is important to respect the existing traditional culture in Ghana, for the country to move forward, they must allow women to become more involved in society. A developing society cannot make progress while half of its population remains uneducated and unemployed. A campaign aimed to alter the existing patriarchal structure is necessary but should also be done with re-

spect to traditional culture.

Handling Harassment Harassment, both from teachers and from students, was a problem that came up repeatedly, in all interviews and most surveys. The first step in combating harassment is to educate the teachers. In many rural schools, teachers still use physical punishment as the main technique for discipline. The teachers need to be taught to use alternative ways of punishment, such as revoking privileges and detention, as well as more positive ways of enforcing behavior, such as a reward system. As a crucial first step, the central government must make corporal punishment illegal, to present a strong, unified statement against the use of bodily punishment. Since law and reality is sometimes disconnected, however, teachers must also understand that corporal punishment makes the students feel unsafe in the classroom, and that it inhibits learning. By educating the teachers on the effect corporal punishment is having on their students, combined with making it illegal, and giving the teachers alternative methods of discipline, bodily punishment in school will slowly be weeded out.

In addition to training the teachers not to use the cane, teachers must be trained on how to handle disputes between students. Since teachers set the environment of a classroom, they must make it clear that harassment and teasing is strictly prohibited. They must not turn a blind eye to the problem, or let bullying children off with a warning. When asked what the teachers do when boys tease them,

the girls admitted that all teachers will ever do is warn the boys, and sometimes not even that. There must be clear and swift punishment for students who harass other students, such as revoking free time or being sent home. Teachers should also make themselves open for any girl to come to them with concerns or problems. The girls in this research appeared to have a close relationship with their teachers, which is important so they feel comfortable reporting harassment.

NGOs looking to help in this area could create a free teacher-training program to educate teachers on how to create a safer, more comfortable environment for their students. With two-third of students reporting that they sometimes or often feel unsafe in the classroom, schools need to focus on the environment they are setting for students. The free teacher-training program could offer incentives for teachers to attend, such as giving away free school supplies for the teachers students, or providing hot meals at the trainings. These incentives may help encourage teachers to attend the training, which is vital to learning about the environment they are setting in the classroom. NGOs could include a follow-up after the training, where they drop in to see how the teacher is progressing in creating a safer classroom environment, rewarding teachers that are implementing new discipline techniques.

5 Summary

The task of increasing female enrollment, retention, and achievement in school in Ghana

is an incredibly difficult, complex one. Looking at the situation with patience, noting how much time real change requires will help weary NGOs continue. In addition, if even one life is bettered because of the work of an NGO, that will be a benefit to Ghanaian society. The problem cannot be tackled all at once, but in a series of small steps, each that has the potential to change a persons life.

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