



**THE CAUSES OF SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM AND DROPOUT RATES OF FEMALES IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTHERN NATIONS, NATIONALITIES, AND PEOPLES'
REGION, ETHIOPIA**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of school absenteeism and dropout among female students in selected primary schools in woredas (districts) of Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region. To achieve this purpose, a survey design was employed with a quantitative data analysis method. Primary data sources were obtained from sample areas of different zones in the region by using multi-stage sampling techniques. The data gathering tool was a questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and inferential statistics like means and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of respondents believed that girls have to study before finishing household jobs, whereas a few of respondents believed that girls should finish household jobs before going to school. Of the observed woredas, 48.1% of respondents do not encourage females to learn school. In Anlemo woreda, Wolaita-Sodo town, Sodo woreda and Wolkite woreda almost all of the respondents encourage females to marry rather than pursue education. Among the main reasons for school absenteeism of girls it was found that household workload and shortage of food at home were the most significant. As a result, a large number of girls were absent from school in Wolaita-Sodo town, Anlemo woreda and Wolkite town every two weeks. Furthermore, the study revealed that among the major causes of female school dropout were economic problems, marriage and distance to school. To reduce girls' school absenteeism and dropout, it is recommended that the regional government should advocate female education and create awareness on the drawback of early marriage through social media and school education.

Key Words: *absenteeism, cause, dropout, education,*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is critical for human development and a central tool for enhancing the capacity of human beings by focusing on competencies (knowledge, attitudes and skills) in a formal setting. It is also a means to reduce poverty, enhance life expectancy, increase productivity and improve problem-solving skills. Thus, education can improve the productivity of individuals in particular and the development of a country in general. Moreover, the participation of girls' at all educational levels (from pre-primary to higher education) is a prerequisite to the sustainable socio-economic development of developing countries and thereby enables a narrowing of the gender gap in educational participation. All children, particularly girls, must have access to and complete quality education by the year 2015 to achieve the third United Nations' eight Millennium Development Goals, namely to promote gender equality and empower women (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000). This goal recommends that every citizen has a right to get equal access to a basic education irrespective of one's race, gender, ethnic group or other factors. However, it has been observed that in developing countries different causes aggravate students' absenteeism and dropout (Chimombo, 2005).

It has been established that students who attend school frequently were more successful in their knowledge acquisition and skills development and thereby improve the habit of working with classmate students to accomplish educational goals (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Therefore, students frequent school attendance helps them be successful in their academic performance, language improvement and social development. Research showed that students who attend school regularly have high academic success, more

frequently complete the grade level they are enrolled in, pass the regional and national exam, and develop collaborative work habits, Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Ferrell, Nance, Torres, and Torres, (2013); Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

In contrast to students who routinely attend school, students who are absent from school frequently achieve lower levels of academic performance. Moreover, they encounter limited future job opportunities and will experience social and emotional problems in adulthood (Buscha & Conte, 2014; Nolan et al., 2013; Şahin, Arseven & Kılıç, 2016). Missing classes regularly not only affects the academic performance of the student but also influences the in-class planning of teachers and the motivations of the other students in the class (Şahin, Arseven & Kılıç (2016).

Regular absenteeism has a significant effect on developing bad behaviour using addicted substances like chat, smoking, drinking alcohol, starting sexual intercourse at an early age as a result getting pregnant and finally, they will terminate their education (Ferrell et al., 2013; Gage et al., 2013; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Nolan et al., 2013; Thornton, Darmody & McCoy, 2013).

In Ethiopia, enrollment of females in education is low compared to their male counterparts. In this regard, Ayalew (2000) confirms that the attitude of the society which gives more value to men than women and various traditional sayings that suggest the women's place is in the home and that women are dependent on men were some of the major factors that hindered women from mainstream education. However, education has a great contribution to women to the wider social network, identification with the modern world encouraging innovation. It helps in improving mothers' well-being and that of their families (Kwesiga, 2002). Similarly, Baker (2003)

summarizes that women and minorities had limited chance to reach school due to country and school characteristics (instruction type, teachers' expectations, curriculum materials, access to education, policy and program guidelines), parental attitudes and economic conditions of family and cultural factors (norms and values). Most countries in the world including Ethiopia have realized the importance of education for national development (FDRE, 1994). Students were considered as absent when they drop out and fail to complete the grade level they were enrolled (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001). Therefore, this research was intended to investigate the causes of girls' school absenteeism and dropout rate in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region of Ethiopia (SNNPR).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Educating females contributes to them in leading their successful life and the community at large in bringing multi socio-economic benefits. Thus, development can be realized through skilled citizens. The world in general and Ethiopia, in particular, has given due attention to a knowledge-based economy. Girls Participation in education is a guaranteed strategy for poverty alleviation, sustainable development and growth of the economy of any country. As to Lartigue (2005) investing in girls' education has an impact on increasing females' productivity at home, improving poverty reduction, ascending family health, increasing child survival rate and enhancing economic growth. However, for the last several years females were left behind in school. Still, several challenges can hinder the accomplishment of the policy to achieve the intended girls' education. More practically, the education of females enhances economic productivity, reduces fertility rates, lower infant and maternal mortality and improves the health

and nutritional status of the family (Gachukia, 2000).

The position of females in society provides an exact measure of the development of the society, but females in third world countries like Ethiopia are subjected to gender discrimination in every walk of their life (Ayalew, 2000). The above idea shows that girls are not treated equally as boys. However, when Ethiopia is striving to be one of the middle-income countries and to achieve MDGs by (2010), one may ask about the status of women educational participation and successes as key priority areas in the development of Ethiopia. Olmos (2011) stated that educating girls is not only educating them but, it is also educating the nation that they contribute to development.

Hence, educating females improve not only women's productivity, but, also enhances the human capital accumulation of future generations. As a result, the participation of girls in education is greatly important in poverty reduction and socio-economic development. However, imparting knowledge in the schools alone is not enough for female students to become efficient and effective to improve their academic performances where the ground is not fertile at home to grow them up. To bring change and advancement to the nations needs the proper participation and empowerment of girls in all aspects. The researcher experience travels to different primary and secondary schools in SNNPRS; helped him to explore a variety of challenges facing female students. Therefore, based on the information mentioned researcher was initiated to conduct the study.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. Examine the extent of girls' school absenteeism;
2. Scrutinize the main causes of female students' school absenteeism;

3. Analyse parents' perception for and against their daughters' education; and
4. Identify school and home- based factors that aggravate female students' dropout.

1.4. Research Questions

To achieve the stated objectives the following research questions were raised to be answered in the courses of the study. These are:

1. To what extent does the school absenteeism of girls' problematic?
2. To what extent do school and home-based factors worsen female students' dropout rate?
3. What are the perceptions of families towards their daughters' education?
4. To what extent do school and home-based factors exacerbate female students' school absenteeism?

2. MAERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Method

The study employed survey research method with the assumption of getting the general picture of the causes of school absenteeism and dropout among female students in public primary school in SNNPR. This method was selected because it is helpful to show situations as they currently exist (Anderson, 1988). Moreover, survey method is cost effective and allowed quick data collection (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the researcher believes that this method is appropriate to describe on-going processes.

2.2. Sources of Data

The main data sources for this study were generated from primary source and secondary sources. The bulk of the data for the study were generated through household survey

questionnaires by using open and closed-ended survey questions. The household survey data were collected from women respondents and school principals in urban and semi-urban areas.

2.3. Samples and Sampling Techniques

The primary data sources were obtained from sample areas of different zones in the region by using multi-stage sampling techniques. Accordingly, the SNNPRS was selected by using purposive sampling technique in that the researcher's Home University is found in this particular region. Then, the zones were selected by using available sampling technique due to their accessibility. Consequently, the *woredas* were further selected by using stratified random sampling techniques. Finally, principals were selected by using purposive sampling technique because of their responsibility. School teachers were selected by using simple random sampling technique from all departments of female teachers. Students selected by using stratified sampling technique. A girl student was sampled from all the forms and in every classroom in the sampled schools. Random sampling was used at the classroom level to select the respondents (the first students to raise their hands). Students' parents were selected simple random sampling techniques. 302 households were selected from each *woredas*. Totally 29 *woredas* and 7 city administration, therefore, a total of 12,080 respondents were selected in the region by using Cochran's (1977) formula of sample size determination.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1. Discussion of results of the study

The SNNPRS region is located in the southern part of the country. The region is consists of 13 zones, one city administration and five special *woredas*. These include Bench maji, Dawro, Gedeo, Guraghe, Gamgofa, Hadiya, Kefa sheka, Kambata-Tembaro, Sidama, Silti, South-Omon and Wolaita zone. Special *woredas* are Basketo, Halaba, Konta, and Yem Segen people.

There are more than 110 *woredas* in the region. Thirty-six of them are selected for this study. Hawassa town is administrated under city administration. The region consists of 56 multi-ethnic groups living together, who have their tradition, language and culture. The region has implemented various packages that aimed to benefit women in education. Thus, this study intended to investigate girls' regular school participation at the *woreda* level.

In this section, the causes of absenteeism and school dropouts were discussed and interpreted based on the analysis of the collected data in themes as follows:

3.1.1. The Perception of Parents on Female Students' Education

Study skills are crucial for the academic success of students in each grade. The study is necessary for obtaining good academic results and for promotion. Through developing study skills students can comprehend what they learned in the classroom. Therefore, developing study skill help students to improve their academic performance in school. The study may require time at home in addition to school hours. Concerning female students studying at home, families have a different perception. The majority of the participants 77.43% (n=4917) believe that they have to study before finishing a household job. However, 22.57% (n=1433) respondents believe that they have to finish the household job before they study.

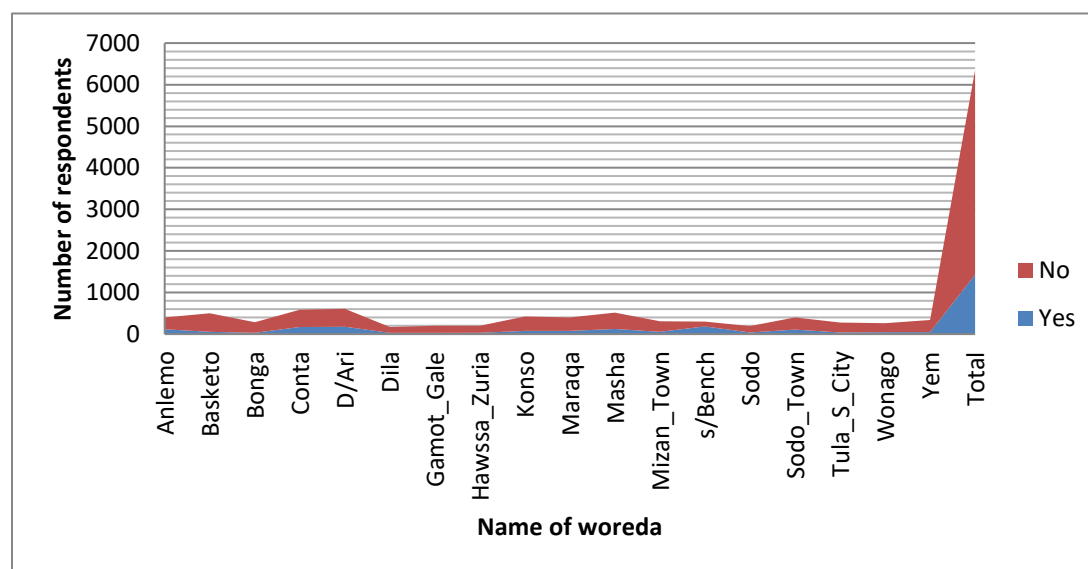


Fig 1: Respondents perception on female students study

As portrayed in Fig.1. Regarding female students studying before finishing a household job, respondents perception differences were observed within *woredas*. In South Bench (S/Bench) 2.90% (n=184) Debub Ari (D/Ari) 2.79% (n=177), Conta 2.69% (n=171) and Masha 2% (n=127) of the respondents believed that females have to finishing household job before

studying. Whereas in Basketo 7.10% (n=451), D/Ari 6.74% (n=428) and Conta 6.47% (n=411) of respondents strongly believed that females have to study without any restriction like their male counter partner. Lack of having study time at home could affect students doing homework. McKelvie, Standing and Smith (2004) stated that to learn and understand the subject taught in the

classroom students should take time to read the material during their spare time and should possess effective study skills. This enables them to store, retain and retrieve information when

needed. Thus, one can understand that investing time in the study will enhance the academic performance of female students.

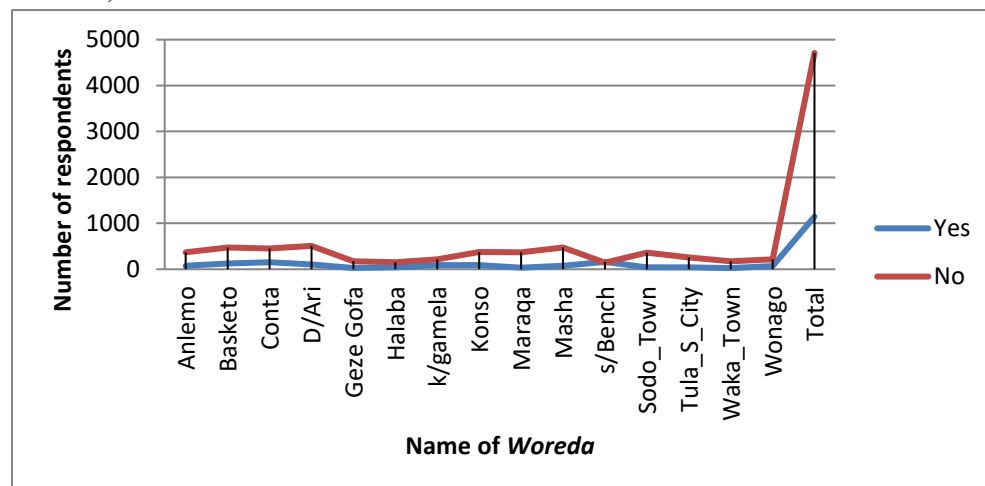


Figure 2: Respondents perceptions on female school time

As indicated in figure 2 most respondents 80.45% (n=4711) insist female students go to school before they finish a household job. However, 19.55% (n=1145) respondents believe that female students have to finish their household job before going to school. This shows that even though they are few in numbers some families do not encourage girls' education. In S/Bench *woreda* 2.70% (n=158), Conta 2.58% (n=151), Basketo

2.17% (n=127) of respondents claimed that girls have to work at home before they go to school. From the observation of the study sites, it is evident that girls in most *woredas* either stay out of the school system because of household responsibilities or are forced to combine school with a household job. Nije, Manion & Bajie (2015) confirmed that household work is considered a barrier to the overall schooling experiences of schoolgirls.

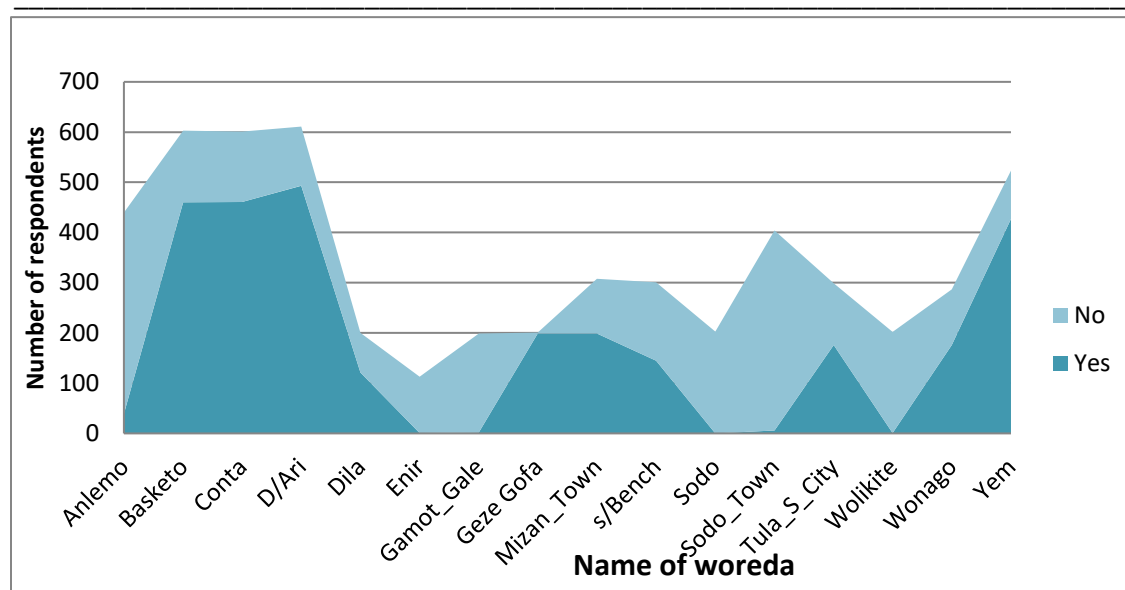


Figure 3: Community encouragement to female students to learn

As depicted in figure 3, 52.9% (n=2906) of respondents encourage females to pursue their education. On the other hand, 48.1% (n=2589) of them do not encourage females to learn. Nevertheless, differences are observed within *woredas* in supporting females to education. In some *woredas* majority of the respondents encourage females to learn such as

D/Ari 493, Conta 461 and Basketo 460 but in some other *woredas*, a large number of respondents does not encourage them to learn such as Anlemo *woreda* out of 440 respondents only 401. In Wolaita-Sodo-town out of 404 respondents, 398 do not encourage females to learn. In Sodo *woreda*, all of the respondents (203) do not encourage females to learn but rather encourage them either to marry or get a job.

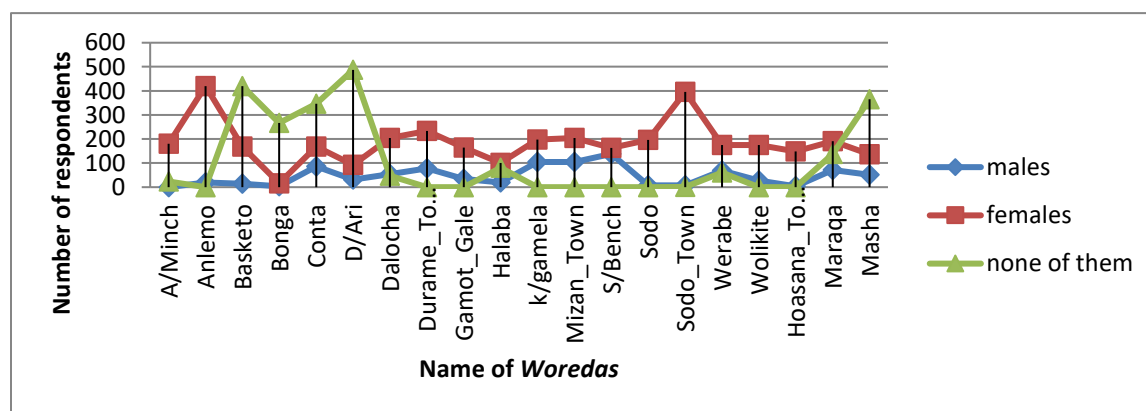


Figure 4: Respondents encouragement of first marriage

Figure 4 shows that the majority of the respondents 54.16% (n= 3733) encourage females to marry first than males. Whereas 32.45% (n=2239) of respondents encourage none of them to marry before completing their education. On the other hand, 13.39% (n=923) of the respondents encourage males to marry first than females. Of which large numbers of respondents are from Anlemo and Wolaita-Sodo-town which accounts 6.09% (n=420) and 5.74% (n= 396) encourage females to marry first respectively. In Abra Minch (A/minch) *woreda* one of the respondents is encouraged males to marry first but 180 of them are in a fever of females to marry at an early age than boys. According to Umemoto (2001), early

marriage inevitably inhibits girls to continue the education that they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future wellbeing of their family and society. Moreover, research conducted by Jones et. al, (spell) (2016) in Ethiopia shows that women marry at an early age than men; they are most likely to be married by the age of 18 than men are by the age of 25. Married girls receive little or no schooling 80% of them have received any education, and 81% cannot read at all. This shows that marriage is one of the main factors that inhibit girls' education. The common factors cited by the study area respondents that lead girls to marriage were that marriage could alleviate poverty or the burdens of a large family living with many daughters.

3.1.2. Extent of Girls School Absenteeism

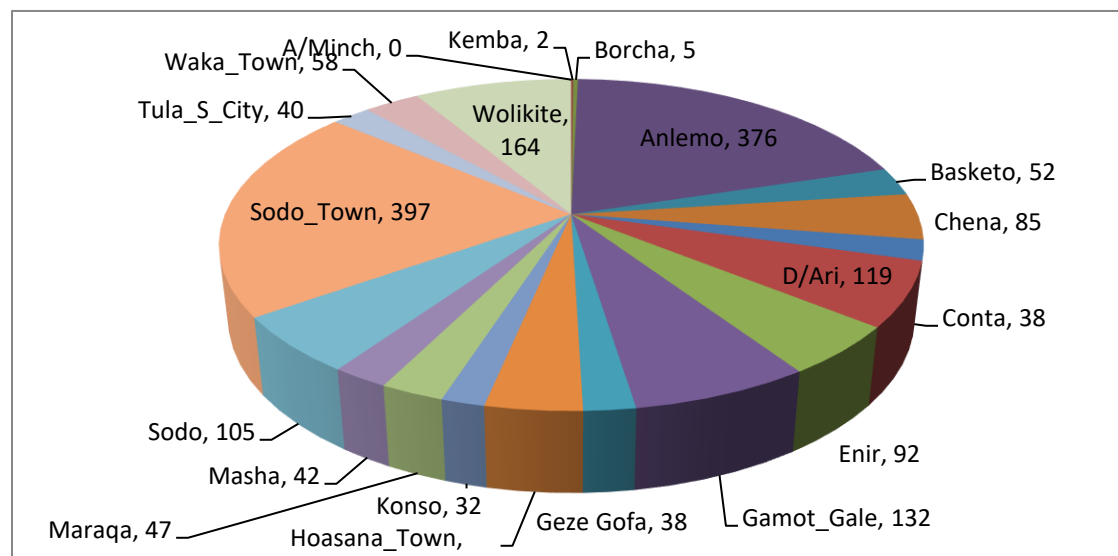


Figure 5: Number of female students' school absenteeism in two weeks' time

As shown in Fig. 5, the absenteeism of students varies from *woreda* to *woreda*. Relatively high absenteeism was observed in Wolaita-Sodo Town 17.24% (n=379), next to that the second-highest number was recorded in Anlemo 16.33% (n=376), and the third-highest number of

absents was registered in Wolikite *woreda* 7.12% (n=164). On the other hand, low students' absenteeism were observed in two weeks' time in A/Minch 0% (n=0), Kemba 0.09 % (n=02) and Borchha 0.22 % (n=05) *woredas*. This shows that some factors cause girls to be absent from school. However,

this needs further empirical examination to identify the underpinning factors.

Absenteeism is one of the contributing factors for students' poor academic performance and subsequently leads to dropout. Coelho, Fischer, McKnight, Matteson & Schwartz (2015) identified that attendance is one of the highest

predictors of student academic achievement. Lamb (2011) stated that absenteeism is one of the factors that can predict students' dropout. Students who are regularly absent from school are most likely to be at risk of dropout. Thus, identifying the most significant factors behind it is an important precursor to effectively addressing the problem.

3.1.3. Causes of Girls School Absenteeism

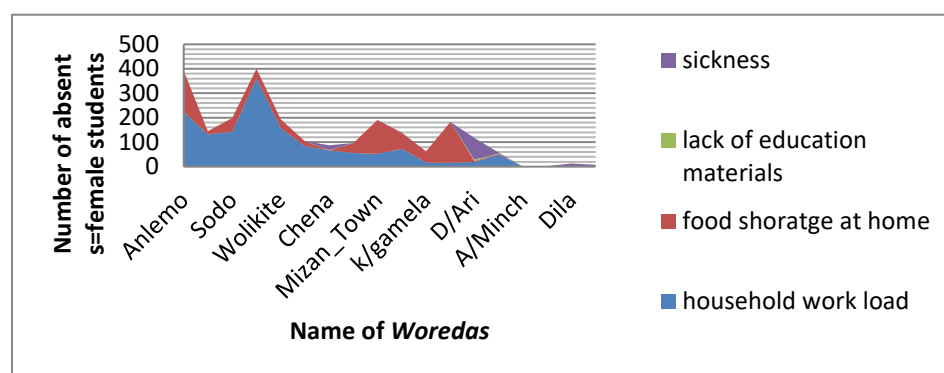


Figure 6: Female students' school absenteeism as a result of home related causes

Figure 6 show that household workload was the highest reason for girls absenteeism in most *woredas*. A large number of female students were absent from school because of household workload especially in the Sodo town 360, Anlemo 224, Wolkite 157 and Sodo 142 *woredas*. Comparatively, only a few female students were absent from school as a result of sickness these are from Debub Ari 89, Chena 20 and Dilla 13 *woredas*. The result of the study confirms that quite a large number of girls in SNNPR (1449) did not attend school because of household workload. Moreover, shortage of food contributed significantly to girls' absenteeism from school especially in Anlemo *woredas* 168, Durame town 167 and Mizantown 139. As a study result, Tefera, Hadley, Lindstrom, Abebe, Lachat and Kolsteren (2011) has affirmed that

food insecurity in adolescents is one of the causes for school absenteeism in Jimma zone, Ethiopia. However, as shown in figure 5, none of the girls was absent due to a shortage of food in Arba Minch, Dalocha, Dilla and Wearable. This indicates that in some *woredas* poverty affects school attendance of girls. According to Jennings (2011), it was confirmed that, in SNNPR, the use of a child for household work is the major cause of school absenteeism and dropout. He identified that "*child labour is extensively practised throughout SNNPR. Highland girls fetch wood and water; do marketing and carry out household chores*". This directly coincides with the identified result in this study. This shows that the responsibility to cover care duties at home is laid down on girls than boys.

3.1.4. Causes of Female students' Dropout from Schools

One of the intentions of this study was to investigate major causes of school dropout in various *woredas* of the SNNPR. Therefore, in the survey, an attempt was made to identify potential

causes for girls' dropout from school in the woredas. Accordingly, the major causes of dropout identified based on the household survey

respondents are economic, social and health-related problems (see figure 7). Thus, each of the causes for school dropout is discussed as follows.

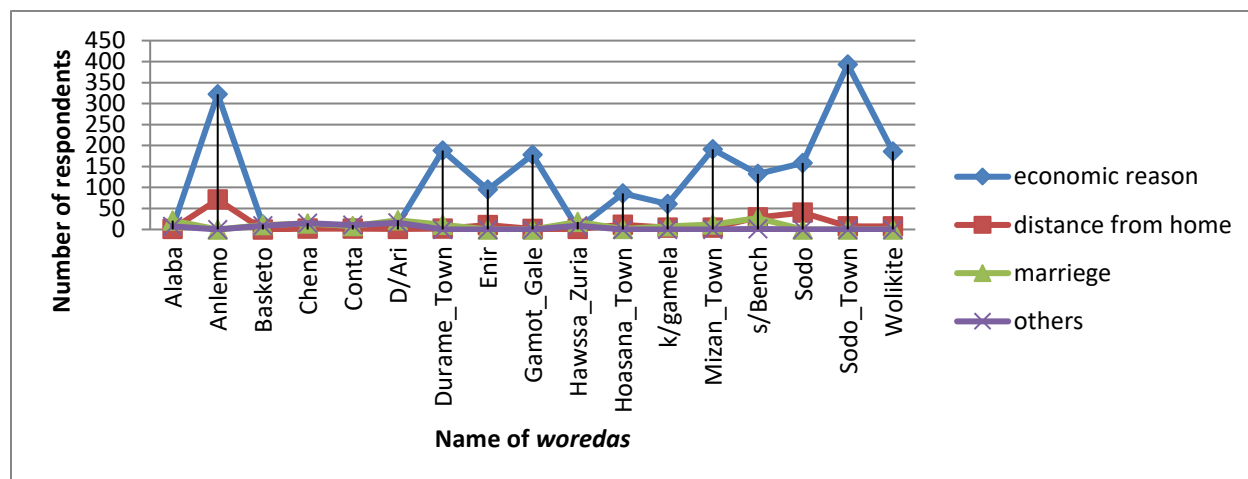


Figure 7: Causes of female students' schools dropout in 2014/2015 academic year

Figure 7 show that in most woreda economic reason is the highest for girls dropping out. Quite a large number of students have terminated their education because of economic reasons particularly in Sodo town 393, Anlemo 322 *woreda*, and Mizan town 191. The above result shows that a large number of girls in SNNPR (1965 girls) did not attend school because of economic problems. In most developing countries, the economic problem is the leading obstacle for children's education in general and girls in particular. Some studies show that low family income may reduce the chance of schooling for girls (Mitiku 2014). Moreover, according to the study participants' response, a distance of school contributed significantly to girls' school dropout especially in Anlemo 71, Sodo 40 and S/Bench 29 *woredas*. The above data in figure 7 shows that the distance of the school from home is not a reason for students' dropout in some *woredas*. For example, in Arba Minch, Dalocha, Geze Gofa, Kemba and Wolkite *woredas*, school distance is not the cause for girls dropping out. This shows that either schools' are built close to students' residences or

people are densely populated. Yokozeki (1996) states that school distance to home has a significant impact on both the initial decision to attend school and the decision to drop out. Thus, in the surveyed *woredas* in SNNPR, most of them were not as such affected by school distance for termination of school. However, school distance affected the school attendance of girls in some *woredas*. The above result indicates that there is enormous progress in the region in school construction closer to students' residence. On the other hand, 209 girls were dropout because of marriage from different *woredas*. The highest number of girls' drop out because of marriage is found in S/Bench 27, Debub Ari 22 and Alaba 21. This indicates that in some *woredas* poverty affects school attendance of girls. Shahidul and Zehadul Karim (2015) confirmed that marriage is one of the causes for girls' dropout in rural areas. Jennings (2011) has explicitly identified one of the major factors that contribute to late arrival at school, absenteeism and dropout from school at all levels, and dropout amongst girls was household work.

3.1.5. Conducive learning environment for girls

To assess school-related factors that hinder female students' school attendance and drop out this section examines access to basic facilities; namely adequacy and access to a textbook, drinking water and sanitation in particular reference to availability and safety of toilet facilities.

Apart from observational data and administrative data were collected from the surveyed schools. Teachers were requested to provide information as to the adequacy and safety of basic services such as the adequacy of water and toilets. The availability of separate toilets for girls were the information that was required from teachers. In general, the school observational data in the surveyed schools suggest that the schools have modest toilets.

1. Teachers' Assessment of Adequacy and Safety of Water and Toilet

Table 1: Adequacy of water and sanitation facilities and safety of school toilets (N = 625)

S.No	Items	Zone	N	Mean	SD	t
1	Female students have a separate toilet rooms	BenchMaji	128	4.54	0.88	
		DebubOmo	99	3.81	1.48	
		GamoGofa_AM	109	4.24	1.04	
		HawassaC.A	45	4.22	0.99	
		Hadeya	21	4.95	0.22	
		Sidama	143	3.78	0.49	
		Total	545	4.27	1.15	20.91**
2	The toilets are clean and well maintained.	BenchMaji	128	3.68	1.16	
		DebubOmo	98	3.39	1.46	
		GamoGofa_AM	111	3.10	1.22	
		HawassaC.A	46	4.59	1.25	
		Hadeya	21	4.38	0.92	
		Sidama	143	3.88	1.01	
		Total	547	3.46	1.29	6.74**
3	There is sufficient water for drinking and sanitation purposes.	BenchMaji	128	2.67	1.49	
		DebubOmo	97	2.25	1.53	
		GamoGofa_AM	108	2.67	4.13	
		HawassaC.A	46	4.20	0.99	
		Hadeya	20	2.25	1.37	
		Sidama	143	2.28	1.42	
		Total	542	2.53	2.6	-3.39**
4	It is very safe for girls to use toilets at school.	BenchMaji	126	3.06	1.62	
		DebubOmo	97	3.11	1.51	
		GamoGofa_AM	110	2.67	1.44	
		Hawassa C.A.	46	2.82	1.12	
		Hadeya	20	1.30	0.73	
		Sidama	142	2.85	0.87	

Total	541	2.85	1.55	-1.83*
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Note that: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

With regard to have separate toilets for female students in the school, teachers generally agreed (Mean = 4.27, SD = 1.15; $t = 20.91$, $p < .01$; Item 1) that female students have separate toilets in their respective schools and they are clean and well maintained (Item 2: Mean = 3.46, SD = 1.29; $t = 6.74$, $p < .01$). Nevertheless, they were not in a position to say that the school latrines are safe for girls (Item 4: Mean = 2.85, SD = 1.55; $t = -1.83$, $p < .05$) as indicated by the negative coefficient of the t-statistics. Contrary to their ratings of availability and adequacy latrines,

teachers disagreed with the idea: “There is sufficient water for drinking and sanitation purposes “(Item 3: Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.62; $t = -3.39$, $p < .01$).

Availability of sufficient textbooks was taken as proxy indicators of the causes of girls’ dropout. Here, the researcher examined to what extent girls have access to these activities based on the data obtained from observation and questionnaires completed by 5636 respondents. Figure 8 presents the availability of basic sufficient books in the schools.

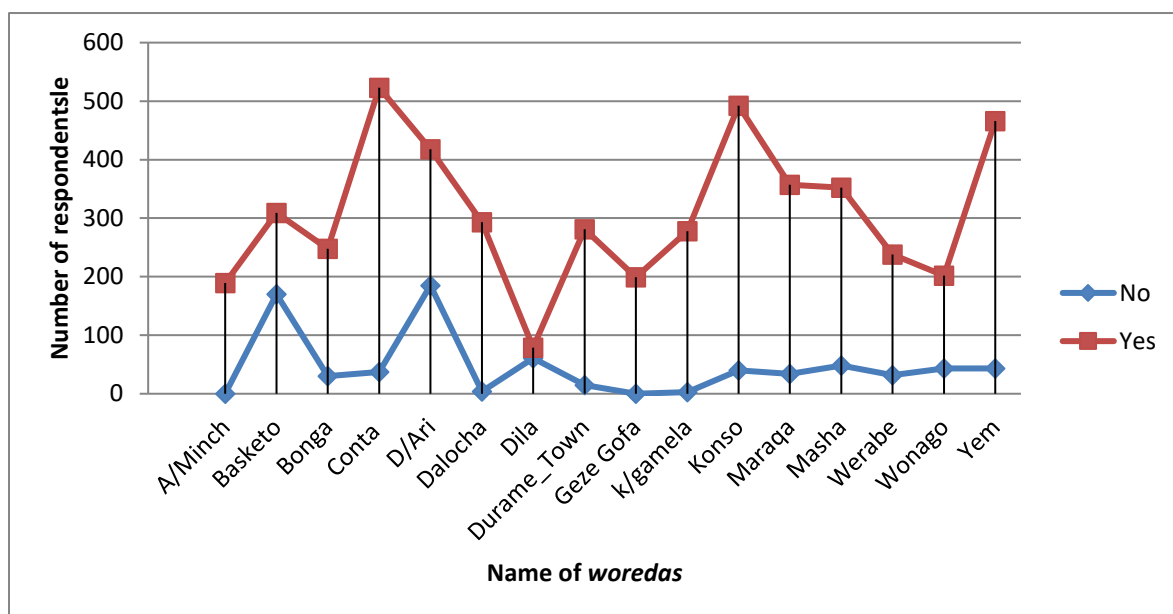


Figure 8: Availability of sufficient books for female students

Figure 8 shows that, the availability of textbooks for female students to support their education is varies amongst *woredas*. In A/Minch 189 and Geze Gofa 199 *woredas* respondents confirmed that there are sufficient textbooks for female students in the school. However, most *woredas* respondents reported that there is a

shortage of textbooks for female students such as in Conta 523, Konso 492, Yem 466 and D/Ari 418. Thus the shortage of textbooks affects students learning in general female students in particular. Besides, it hinders the participation of students in-class activities and their academic performance. As stated in Zuze and Reddy, (2014) availability of textbook improves learning

and students achievement, enhance the quality of education, and motivate students' participation in the classroom and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, research findings show that in South Africa, students, especially girls, do better on reading tests when they have their copies of textbooks. Thus lack of textbook influence female students educational participation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1. Conclusions

Female students are lag behind in school participation due to absenteeism and dropout in the SNNP region. The result of the study shows that most parents have a positive attitude towards girls education. However, it was confirmed from the study result that the causes of student absenteeism were household workload, food shortage at home, lack of educational materials and sickness. Among these factors, the household workload is found that as a major one that contributed to girls' school absenteeism. On the other hand, the findings revealed that the major causes of school dropout were economic problems, school distance and marriage. The highest numbers of girls were dropped out as a result of poverty concerning earning money for their survival.

4.2. Recommendations

The SNNP regional government should work on advocating female education to minimize their workload at home to have study time at home. The SNNPR government should increase awareness about the drawback of early marriage through social media and school education. The regional government education bureau should work on minimizing school absenteeism and dropout, especially for female students. The regional government should find ways of

stopping child labour exploitation. Families of dropout students have to be supported economically to fulfill the needs of their children. The regional state considers either introducing economic support or creating job opportunities for the poor households to enable them to minimize female students' dropout. The economic support may take the form of an in-kind or cash support scheme targeting parents who were unable to send their daughters to school due to economic problems and a shortage of food. There is a remarkable achievement in narrowing the distance of the school from home in different areas of the country. However, the research result shows that in some places there is a problem that needs the effort of the government to narrow the school distance problem. Thus, the region has to exert efforts to build more schools closer to where students live. Finally, the regional education bureau of SNNPR should organize experience sharing forums taking as a model the achievements registered by successful *woredas* in the region.

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