

# How Insecurity Impacts on School Attendance and School Dropout among Urban Slum Children in Nairobi

Netsayi N. Mudege, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

Eliya M. Zulu, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

Chimaraoke Izugbara, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

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# How Insecurity Impacts on School Attendance and School Dropout among Urban Slum Children in Nairobi

Netsayi N. Mudege, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

Eliya M. Zulu, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

Chimaraoke Izugbara, African Population and Health Research Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

This paper discusses how perceptions of personal security can impact on school enrolment and attendance. It mainly focuses on threats of physical harm, crime, and community and domestic violence. These security fears can include insecurity that children suffer from as they go to school, maybe through the use of unsafe routes; insecurity that children feel at school; and the insecurity they suffer from in their homes. Although poverty can be a source and/or an indicator of insecurity, this paper does not focus solely on poverty as it is well covered elsewhere in the literature. The paper relies on qualitative data collected in Korogocho and Viwandani slum areas in Nairobi, Kenya between October and November 2004. The paper analyses data from individual interviews and focus group interviews and focuses on the narrative of slum dwellers on how insecurity impacts on educational attainment. The conclusion in this paper is that insecure neighbourhoods may have a negative impact on schooling. As a result policies that address insecurity in slum neighbourhoods can also improve school attendance and performance.

## 1. Introduction

Recent research on violence has moved to the micro scale, seeking to understand violence on a small scale, such as in school settings, or at least violence against educational institutions. In North America this has been prompted by a number of isolated high-profile shootings at schools and universities leading to the death of students or teachers. Others would deny that school violence is as rampant as is reported in literature, and claim that the heightened sense of school insecurity is a result of media panic that magnifies isolated incidences of violence within schools (Thompkins 2000). In most sub-Saharan African countries violence in schools has been studied at the state level, especially where the state uses its repressive mechanisms to quell student rioters and put student leaders in prison under torture (O'Malley 2007); other studies have focused on sexual abuse in schools (Leach and Humphrey 2007;

Mirembe and Davies 2001). In Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Palestine focus has been on attacks on educators as well as how wars can stop children from getting an education (O'Malley 2007). For example in countries like Afghanistan and Palestine statistics have recounted numbers of teachers killed as a result of violent conflict and abductions (Human Rights Watch 2006). In North America and Europe the interest in schools and insecurity has mostly been directed at war-torn countries like Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Iraq. In these countries, O'Malley writes, "schools, places that should be safe for children, have increasingly become the prime target of attacks by armed parties" (2007, 7).

Focusing on extremely violent situations in both the Middle East and Africa has meant that apart from a narrow focus on sexual abuse by teachers in school and corpo-

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ral punishment, the effect of insecurity on education in politically stable contexts has been left under-theorized and understudied. Although the intensity and duration of violent conflict and wars make their effects on education highly visible, the majority of the world's poor living in inner-city neighbourhoods and slums suffer from varying degrees of violence that can also have negative influence on educational attainment and schooling outcomes. As documented by Mugisha (2006) and Magadi, Zulu and Brockhoff (2003), a large proportion of the urban poor in third world countries is living in "life and health threatening neighbourhoods" (Cairncross et al. 1990, cited in Mugadi et al. 2003, 347). According to Williams (2000), education can be linked to security in two major ways. Education can be studied to understand its potential influence to "redress global security threats", or, alternatively, to understand "the impact of the new security threats on education" (Williams 2000, 193). This paper will investigate how physical security threats can impact on school attendance and primary school dropout among urban slum children in Nairobi. Where possible limited reference to other low income but non-slum neighbourhoods in Nairobi will be made to enhance an understanding of the conditions facing slum children. This paper is based on research that was carried out in two slum areas, namely Korogocho and Viwandani in Nairobi.

Some studies using social disorganization theory look at the local level and claim that weak communities are vulnerable to crime and insecurity because they lack the mechanisms to prevent them. "Strong communities . . . are institution centred. Their cohesion and moral competence derive from the strength and integrity of families, schools, parties, government agencies, voluntary associations and law. With regard to crime the essential argument derived from social disorganization theory is that institutionally strong communities are better able to prevent crimes as well as respond to crime when it happens" (Karp and Breslin 2001, 249). High levels of crime, victimization and violence in any community are strong indicators of insecurity. Korogocho and Viwandani have weak institutions characterized by a general breakdown of law and order, chronic poverty and high rates of unemployment, all indicators of heightened insecurity in the slums.

This paper is concerned with how perceptions of personal security can impact on school enrolment and attendance. An enrolled child will refer to a child who is registered in school at the beginning of the year, who may or may not have been attending school at the time of the study. Attendance (or a child in school) will refer to a child who was enrolled at the beginning of the year and was actively going to school at the time of the study and a dropout will refer to a child who left school. Fear of personal harm, crime and violence can heighten the sense of insecurity among residents. In this instance fear will refer to "the institutional, cultural and psychological repercussion of violence that produces a sense of 'insecurity' and vulnerability" (Moser and Rogers 2005, 4). Security fears can include insecurity that children suffer from as they go to school, maybe through the use of unsafe routes; insecurity that children feel at school; and the insecurity they suffer from in their homes. The paper focuses mainly on local-level violence and other forms of violence such as school-based violence, giving a detailed description of these and an analysis of how these affect children. The limited use of descriptive statistics will attempt to show that these kinds of violence are most prevalent in poor slum areas as compared to other low income but less deprived neighbourhoods in Nairobi.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is largely based on qualitative data collected in October and November 2004 in Korogocho and Viwandani slum areas in Nairobi, Kenya, although it also makes reference to quantitative data collected under the Education Research Project (ERP). The qualitative data comes from an Information for Development (IFD) study nested onto the Nairobi Urban Health and Demographic Surveillance System (NUHDSS), a longitudinal study implemented by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in the two slum communities since 2000. The ERP project is also nested onto the NUHDSS. The NUHDSS involves regular visits to every household once every four months to update key events (such as birth, deaths, in and out migrations and a number of other social and health characteristics) and it covers about 60,000 people in some 23,000 households. Several other studies are nested on the NUHDSS to provide a rich data set to examine specific aspects of well-being among residents.

Using the NUHDSS as a sampling frame, APHRC designed the nested qualitative study which focused on the roles boys and girls play within their families and communities and how these may affect their schooling outcomes. Another area of interest for this study was to investigate the impact of free primary education on school enrolment. Although no direct questions on security were asked it emerged in all interviews and focus group discussions that many people in the study were concerned with the perceived high levels of insecurity in the slums. In all focus group discussions it was only Viwandani men in the 30–49 age group who did not mention insecurity in the slums as a possible cause for students dropping out of school.

The IFD study had two components: focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews. The focus groups were more encompassing in terms of age. The sample covered community members aged twelve and older differenti-

ated by age and gender. Table 1 indicates the composition of the focus groups.

The field supervisor recruited participants for the focus group discussions by announcing and explaining the aims of the research at community forums as well as making follow-up visits to people’s homes to recruit and seek permission.

The second part of the study consisted of respondents who were selected for individual in-depth interviews. The Demographic Surveillance System (DSS) data was used to identify the respondents. The final sample was based on purposive sampling as it had to cover a variety of characteristics. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of individual in-depth interview participants.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Focus group discussions**

Group characteristics	Age category	Number of participants	
		Korogocho	Viwandani
Women	20-49 pilot	7	7
	25-29	6	5
	30-49	8	7
Girls in formal primary school	12-14	8	8
Girls in informal primary school	12-14	8	8
Girls in secondary school	15-19	6	6
Girls out of school	12-14	8	4
	15-19	8	8
Boys in formal primary school	12-14	8	8
Boys in informal primary school	12-14	8	8
Boys in secondary school	15-19	8	6
Boys out of school	12-14	8	6
	15-19	6	8
Men	20-49 pilot	6	6
	25-29	7	5
	30-49	9	8
Community leaders mixed gender	20-30	8	
Community leaders mixed group	36+	8	7
Community leaders males only	20-30		6
Total	36 groups	135	121

**Table 2: Characteristics of individual in-depth interview participants**

Group characteristics	Age category	Number of participants by slum	
		Korogocho	Viwandani
Boys in formal primary school	12-14	2	2
Boys in informal primary school	12-14	2	2
Boys out of school	12-14	1	2
	15-19	1	
Boys in secondary school	15-19	1	1
Girls in formal primary school	12-14	2	1
Girls in informal primary school	12-14	2	2
Girls out of school	12-14	2	2
	15-19	1	1
Girls in secondary school	15-19	1	1
Parents with children in school		4	4
Parents with children out of school		4	4
Teachers both formal and informal		3	3
Total	51 individuals	26	25

The interviews and discussions were based on a broad set of themes that interviewers had to probe. For instance, why children drop out of school, what people’s views on free primary education were, and questions on school attendance and enrolment. All focus group discussions were conducted in Kiswahili by native speakers, while all teach-

ers' interviews were conducted in English. All individual interviews were conducted in Kiswahili. The language of use was determined by the preferences of the interviewees.

All focus group discussions and interviews were tape recorded and transcribed and translated into English by a hired professional transcriber. The resultant transcripts were then coded using Nud\*ist 6.0, a coding software used in the analysis of qualitative data. The codes primarily focused on the reasons for dropping out of school with a special focus on the gender dimensions as well as on questions related to the free primary education initiative.

The data from the Education and Research Project (ERP) are largely quantitative. In 2005 the ERP focused on young people between the ages of five and nineteen in Korogocho and Viwandani (the two slums studied by the IFD project) as well as two low-income non-slum neighbourhoods within Nairobi (Harambe and Jericho which were not part of the IFD qualitative study communities). From the ERP study we use children's answers relating to drug use in school, fears of being harassed by teachers or fellow students, use of weapons and sexual abuse in schools as proxies for insecurity. Although the baseline in 2005 had 11,173 children, statistics in this paper are limited to people above the age of twelve, totalling 4,839, to whom the complete behavioural questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire also had a series of skips depending on whether the child was in school at the time of the study or had engaged in or not engaged in certain behaviours that were being investigated. STATA software was used to generate these statistics.

### 2.1 Poverty and Security

Many studies of security have often pointed out that pervasive poverty is a threat to security and therefore, for the "multitudes of humanity caught up in the poverty trap, their human security is compromised" (Mutesa and Nchito 2003, 9). High poverty levels are therefore linked to heightened levels of insecurity. In Uganda, Lwanga-Ntale and McClean (2003) linked poverty and security by positing that insecurity caused by cattle raiding in some parts of Uganda had caused poverty as people were left with no oxen for farming. Therefore, poverty and insecurity could be regarded as part of a vicious cycle in which either may be a result or cause of the other. In a study report APHRC (2002) highlights

lack of jobs, proper housing and affordable water supplies as prevalent in slum areas in Nairobi, including Korogocho and Viwandani. The report pointed out that lack of employment opportunities makes children and adolescents in the slum areas more vulnerable in terms of morbidity risks from childhood diseases, early sexual initiation and risks of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, compared to children elsewhere in Kenya. Viwandani and Korogocho have a high rate of unemployment, poverty, crime, poor sanitation and generally poorer health indicators when compared to Nairobi as a whole (Mugisha 2006). Thus the insecurity suffered by adolescents in Viwandani and Korogocho may also be linked to the high levels of poverty in the two communities.

Different organizations and government departments have advanced a variety of definitions of human security. The United Nations Development Programme defines human security as "freedom from fear and want" (King and Murray 2001). Japanese foreign policy defines human security as covering "All the menaces that threaten human survival, daily life and dignity – for example environmental degradation, violations of human rights, transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, refugees, poverty and anti-personnel land mines and other infectious diseases such as AIDS – and strengthens efforts to confront these threats" (see King and Murray 2001). Although there are no agreed definitions of what precisely security is, there is generally agreement that insecurity is linked to chronic threats of disease, hunger and poverty. Therefore, insecurity and poverty cannot be divorced from each other. Severe levels of poverty may expose people to all kinds of security threats and violence, as noted by McCawley: "at the personal level, poor people in developing countries frequently face relatively high risks from such things as domestic violence, crime, sickness, unemployment . . ." (2004, 4). In Korogocho and Viwandani in both focus group discussions and individual interviews, study participants often pointed to all kinds of insecurities (such as domestic violence, fear of harassment at school, etc.) as factors that may lead to a child dropping out of school.

### 2.2. Study Context

Korogocho was officially recognized as a slum settlement in December 1978, although some people claim to have

started settling in Korogocho in the 1950s. According to the NUHDSS results for September 2007 (APHRC 2007), in Korogocho, among men aged eighteen years and older, only 11 percent were in salaried employment, 10 percent in established trading, 34 percent in casual employment, 29 percent in petty trading, and 15 percent without any income-generating activity. Among women, 50 percent were not involved in any income-generating activity; 32 percent were in petty trading, 8 percent in casual employment, 4 percent in salaried employment and 6 percent in established trading. Korogocho does not have high educational attainment levels for its adult population. Most of the residents are either uneducated or dropped out of school at primary level; only 19 percent of the men and 12 percent of the women had attended secondary school.

Viwandani was officially recognized as a settlement in 1973, although people started settling almost at the same time as the settlers in Korogocho. According to the NUHDSS results, in September 2007, among men aged eighteen and older, 20 percent were in salaried employment, 7 percent in established trading, 42 percent in casual employment, 14 percent in petty trading, and 12 percent without any income-generating activity. On the other hand 50 percent of women were not engaged in any income-generating activities, 19 percent were involved in petty trading, 18 percent in casual employment, 3 percent in salaried employment and 7 percent in established trading. The level of education among the adult population was higher than in Korogocho, with 48 percent of males and 36 percent of females having attained a secondary school education

There are a total of eighty-two schools within the two slums and their neighbourhoods, forty in Korogocho and forty-two in Viwandani. Out of these only eight are government schools. The government schools are the only ones that benefit from public funding (including the free primary education initiative), the rest are non-government informal schools. Focusing just on the schools within the Demographic Surveillance Area, there are a total of fifty-seven schools (thirty-one in Korogocho and twenty-six in Viwan-

dani) with only four of these being government schools, two in each site. In Korogocho and Viwandani, lack of schooling facilities was identified by some study participants as a factor in why some children do not attend school. Mugisha (2006) and Undie et al. (forthcoming) note that the very high rate of urbanization in Kenya has reduced the government's ability to adequately provide for the urban population in terms of schooling facilities as well as other infrastructure. Endemic poverty may also explain why the poor fail to enrol in school or, if they do, to receive good quality education. When free primary education was introduced there was an influx of children into the slum schools. In discussions with both young and old, it emerged that many Korogocho and Viwandani residents acknowledged the importance of education. There was evidence of parental involvement in children's education as parents tried to ensure that their children attained an education.

There is high demand for education in slum communities despite the fact that research has shown that the slum schools are usually of poor quality (Mugisha 2006). The average net primary school enrolment rate (NER) for Korogocho and Viwandani in the period 2000–05 stood at 80.2 percent for Korogocho and 87 percent for Viwandani, which was higher than the national net enrolment rate of 76.5 percent but slightly lower than for non-slum areas in Nairobi which stood at 90.7 percent (NUHDSS).<sup>1</sup>

Despite the unique peculiarities of the two slum areas, this paper does not compare them. Both slum areas experience high levels of insecurity which this paper will demonstrate may impact on parents' willingness to send children to school or may result in children being unwilling to go to school even where school fees may be available and other schooling-related costs catered for.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Slum insecurity

Whilst threats to physical security and violence are not a preserve of slum and other impoverished neighbourhoods, research has shown that people in slums and other inner

<sup>1</sup> The net enrolment rate is the total number of children in the official school-going age group registered in school expressed as a percentage of

the total population of children in the official school-going age.

city neighbourhoods are more likely to suffer from crime and violence compared to people in more affluent parts of the city. “Class, age, sex and location are factors which in effect make a difference as to whether a person is likely to be a victim of crime” (Jimeno 2001, 227; see also Wilson 1989 for a similar argument). Problems of violence and general insecurity might be concentrated in the slums because they are economically marginalized and slum inhabitants also suffer from other forms of discrimination which make them vulnerable to crime and its concomitant insecurity. For instance, Proto (2003) notes that in Nairobi, slums house more than 60 percent of the population yet occupy only 5 percent of the residential land at the same time as there is dramatic incidence of urban poverty, violent crime and mob justice in these slum settlements, and concludes that this has led to the formation of geographies of fear and marginality within Nairobi. For example in one focus group discussion in Korogocho (women aged 20 – 49) some participants said:

*Respondent 3: Cases of rape are quite common.*

*Moderator: So there are many cases of rape?*

*Respondent 4: Yes, and no action is taken since we are just treated as ordinary people.*

*Respondent 3: And even if you arrest the rape perpetrator they still end up getting released and go unpunished.*

*This will encourage him to keep on with the habit since no action is taken against him.*

*Respondent 5: There is one in our plot who was raped. The relatives have been pursuing the case with no progress since the culprit is still at large, yet the child is already out of school. The government isn't doing enough to curb the rape cases.*

Elsewhere Amnesty International (2002) has noted that it is difficult for rape victims in Kenya to get justice. The people in Viwandani and Korogocho generally feel insecure and disillusioned that the police are not doing enough and that they have been largely forgotten by the government. They generally feel that the government does not take their security problems seriously and in some cases the police are sources of insecurity.

*Moderator: What other things contribute to boys dropping out of school?*

*Respondent 4: Harassment by the police. Let's say you've been sent to the kiosk at 8 p.m. and you meet the cops, they will arrest you; and since you don't have any money, you will be taken to court and jailed for six months. So after those six months, you can't get back to school. (Korogocho focus group discussion, boys in school, age 15 – 19).*

One male primary school teacher in Korogocho pointed that on at least one occasion he had had to go to the police station to secure the release of girls who had been arrested for “roaming up and down”. The perception that the police are sometimes sources of insecurity, particularly for young men, has been raised elsewhere (see Proto 2003 and Gimode 2001). During the height of the Mungiki terror killings in May 2007 (when a gang terrorized inhabitants of Nairobi and surrounding districts), there was debate in parliament as some ministers were of the opinion that police were harassing and killing innocent male youths, accusing them of belonging to the terror gang.

ERP data collected in 2005 indicate high levels of feelings of insecurity among slum children compared to non-slum children of school-going age. For instance a higher proportion of children above the age of twelve in slum areas had carried a knife for personal protection at some time, compared to children from non-slum areas.

**Table 3: Respondents who reported carrying a weapon (slum areas vs. non-slum areas)**

	Non slum	% non-slum	slum	% slum	Total	% Total
Never	914	97.34	2,740	91.09	3,654	92.58
Once	14	1.49	166	5.52	180	4.56
2 or 3 times	4	0.43	61	2.03	65	1.65
4 or 5 times	2	0.21	24	0.8	26	0.66
6 or more times	2	0.21	13	0.43	15	0.38
Refused	3	0.32	4	0.13	7	0.18
Total	939	100	3,008	100	3,947	100

Source of data: ERP 2005

For the slum children there was no difference between boys and girls as very similar proportions of boys and girls had

ever carried a weapon to defend themselves. The fear of crime was also expressed in all focus group discussions and individual interviews, and prominent among these was the fear of being harassed by fellow students. The fear of crime and possible physical harm contributed to general insecurity levels in the community.

Factors that contribute to high insecurity levels in these slum areas include low presence of law enforcement agents, and high levels of unemployment among youth leading to idleness, drug and alcohol abuse and crime. For example, in the ERP data 7 percent of students in slum schools admitted to ever having sold drugs, whilst only 1.5 percent of non slum children admitted to this. However a high number of children in both slum and non-slum schools said that there was a drug and alcohol problem at their school, with 43 percent in slum schools and 30 percent in non-slum schools admitting this. Although most studies of insecurity in Nairobi have focused on how insecurity negatively affects the economy by pushing tourists and investors away, our main focus will be to look at how this insecurity impacts on education and educational attainment among slum children.

### 3.2. Reasons for Dropping Out of School

A variety of reasons were given to explain why some children were not going to school. Lack of security within the schools and in the slum neighbourhoods in general, and poverty, as well as early pregnancies, were frequently mentioned. Although both male and female children had security fears it will become apparent that sometimes their fears emanated from different concerns. For instance boys feared assaults whilst girls were mostly afraid of rape, sexual assault and harassment. However despite these differences security fears impacted on school enrolment, dropout and sometimes school performance.

Poverty is frequently rightly mentioned in the literature as a cause of school dropout, or non-enrolment in school. Poverty in the two slum areas is endemic. In a focus group discussion in Korogocho (boys aged 15 – 19) one respondent pointed out that:

*One of the problems the youth here face is poverty. Poverty has stopped us developing and you find that most*

*of us come from poor families and as a result we cannot even finish school due to poverty. Our parents cannot even afford food because of the poverty.*

Insecurity, however, is also a dimension of poverty. Especially in Nairobi the poorer people are, the more insecure they are. For example, Proto (2003) notes that the police force has largely become impotent in Nairobi and encumbered by lack of resources and general demoralization and apathy. He points out that those who can afford to do so hire security from private firms or have their own private armies popularly known as *Jeshi la Mzee*. These private armies frequently terrorize the poor who do not have the means to protect themselves (Proto 2003). Gimode (2001) also points out that among the poor there is a perception that the police can be bribed by those with money not to investigate certain issues.

### 3.3. Threats to Personal Security

Threats to personal and physical security can make children drop out of school. Children and their parents sometimes found it difficult to attend school and/or to enforce school attendance because of lack of guarantees to the physical security of children attending school. Major among the threats against physical security was the issue of rape and this mostly affected female children. Parents in both Viwandani and Korogocho sometimes withdraw their children from school for fear that the children might be raped on their way to school. This fear was expressed by all the age groups interviewed regardless of gender. In the female age 12 – 14 group discussion in Korogocho it was pointed out that at least three people were raped every week in the community and some of those raped were victims of gang rapes. One of the participants in this group knew a victim of rape:

*Moderator: Do you know anyone who was a victim?*

*Respondent: At home a neighbour of ours. One day she was leaving at six in the morning because she was schooling in Eastleigh. She would leave at five o'clock with the Nissans on the road just there. One day she appeared at the corner. She was held and taken down to that direction near the river [points]. She was raped and left there. She got pregnant and she gave birth and up to now she has never gone back to school.*

Research from other slum areas in Nairobi (e.g. Kibera) corroborates that girls have a heightened fear of being raped, with 60 percent of girls interviewed by the Population Council in Kibera expressing a fear of being raped (Erulkar and Matheka 2007). Although in the absence of reliable official statistics we can not say whether the perception of high incidences of rape was a reflection of reality, it is the perception of the prevalence of this type of crime, not its actual prevalence that often determines how people act. If there is a perceived lack of personal security people can decide to withdraw from participating in normal community life and sometimes schooling was targeted as one of those few things that a person could forgo.

Slum residents also regarded longer distances to school as heightening security threats. The longer the distance to school, the less physically secure the children were deemed to be. Children felt vulnerable if they had to pass through insecure areas such as bushes or had to use “mata-tus” (public transport) or get transport from private motorists on the road. Since local schools are over-subscribed children have to look for places elsewhere. These children would then have to walk long distances to school. One female respondent who had dropped out of school has this to say regarding her sense of insecurity when she was still attending school:

*I used to walk to school through some risky area called Rurii. Sometimes people used to be murdered in that area. . . . One day some people were murdered at Rurii, the risky place where I was passing on my way to school. This caused fear to my mother and I had no choice, I had to use this Rurii short-cut in order to get to school by seven in the morning. The road which is secure was a long distance to school; also my mother had no money for my bus fare. The teachers on the other hand were strict about keeping time. Children who were late for school were punished and sent back home. I was in a dilemma, I feared using the Rurii short-cut, which at times was so deserted. So I started missing school, I continued missing school until I completely dropped out.*

Most parents in focus group discussions and individual interviews pointed out that because the local schools were full they had to register their children at other schools.

This also meant that their children would be more exposed to the dangers associated with schooling far away from home. They pointed out that some children had been kidnapped and later found murdered, and in most cases the culprits were not caught. Parents felt that the school could not provide a protective environment for their children. This reluctance to send children to school fearing for their safety can be understood in the context of Kenyan society where rape victims are stigmatized (see Kangara no date).

Although no cases of homosexual rape were cited, the issue of rape did not only affect female students. Male children were also affected, albeit in a different way. When asked about other things that contribute to boys dropping out of school one male respondent in a Viwandani focus group discussion (secondary school boys aged 15–19) had this to say:

*What happen mostly are rape cases. If you rape a girl and she knows your place, she comes with the police and this can make you run away and even leave school.*

In some cases, as some girls in a focus group discussion pointed out, a girl could be forced by her boyfriend to have sex. If the girl got pregnant then both the boy and girl had to leave school so that they could start their own family.

It would, however, be a misconception to claim that only parents stopped their children from going to school because of fear of rape or because of general harassment by boys at school. Sometimes the child would decide to stop going to school. A male respondent in the focus group discussion in Korogocho (boys aged 12–14 attending informal school) pointed out that:

*There is a way a girl can come to school, the boys start to threaten her. So then they start to force her to let them help carry her books. And because the girl starts to refuse, they say, “you refuse but one day you will see”, so she starts fearing that when she goes to school she might be killed or raped.*

A female respondent in a group discussion (girls aged 12–14 in formal school) had this to say:

*You meet with people and they rape you. Now you lose hope and say, 'ah! I will never go to school if that school is what got me raped'.*

Thus fear may make a student drop out of school. The school environment might generally be insecure for the female student. This however is not only limited to slum schools. According to Leistikow (2003), Kenya's Ministry of Education identified teachers' negative attitudes towards female students, especially the fact that teachers allowed boys to bully girls in class, as a hindrance to girls' participation and performance in class. Thus to regain a measure of security they might decide to drop out of school.

Although none of the interviewed people admitted to ever having been raped or to raping anyone the fear of rape was not baseless.<sup>2</sup> One of the respondents pointed out that her sister had been kidnapped and they had not heard from her for a number of years, and when she came back she already had a second child. Another respondent pointed out that her neighbour had been raped one morning on her way to school.

Feelings of insecurity may emanate from the fact that those entrusted with students' security in schools are not able to ensure it or are, in some cases, the source of insecurity. According to Hudson (1999, 26), the head teacher, the senior teacher and the caretaker of any school should be responsible for safety and security in schools. This should however be extended to the individual teachers who are to some extent responsible for the safety and security of those they teach. The opposite is sometimes the case, as in interviews it emerged that teachers can be a source of insecurity forcing students to drop out of school. Teachers sometimes were the cause of school dropout.

In individual interviews and focus group discussion boys frequently pointed to severe beatings and hatred by teachers as reasons why they dropped out of school. Stearns and Glennie (2006) noted elsewhere, in the United States, that boys are more likely to drop out of school because of harsh

disciplinary measures by teachers compared to girls. However, the existing quantitative data from the ERP does not show any major differences between boys and girls regarding their fear of being harassed by teachers. Twelve per cent of female students and 11 percent of male students in slum schools were worried about being harassed by teachers at their schools. However, the survey did not ask for specific forms of harassment experienced, therefore it is not easy to tell from this data whether girls and boys underwent different kinds of teacher harassment.

However, out of the four teachers interviewed only two admitted to using corporal punishment although the second teacher pointed to other forms of punishment. The first teacher (a female) admitted that she had beaten a child in an unsuccessful attempt to force her not to drop out of school (since the child had begun to miss lessons). A male principal in a formal school responded to questions as follows:

*Interviewer: What do you do to punish kids here?*

*Respondent: There are so many things, we talk to them. If a child takes this dictionary – (pointing to the dictionary) – I cannot beat that child. Also we have a lot of work here, mopping here and there, we have various tasks. If a child comes late in the morning, he can collect rubbish and that's enough.*

*Interviewer: Okay and so who do you cane, children who have done what?*

*Respondent: There are some instances, but it's not beating ... I cannot call it caning because I don't know whether you understand what caning is, that one I cannot call caning. ... It is mild like beating their [buttocks] with a cane.*

Teachers were a little reluctant to talk about whether they beat school children as a form of punishment or not, probably because corporal punishment in Kenyan schools was outlawed in 2001 and therefore admitting to beating children would have been admitting that one was conducting an illegal activity. The two teachers who admitted that

<sup>2</sup> See Kangara (no date) on sexual violence among adolescents in Kenya.

they beat students were both in informal schools outside of formal controls.

On the other hand in individual interviews and focus group discussions, sexual abuse by teachers sometimes resulting in pregnancy was frequently pointed out as the reason why some girls dropped out of school.

**Table 4: Respondents who reported sexual advances by teachers (slum areas vs. non-slum areas)**

Teachers try to have sex with pupils and sometimes do have sex with them						
	Non slum	% non-slum	Yes	% slum	Total	% Total
Strongly agree	14	2.06	280	12.52	294	10.09
Somewhat agree	26	3.83	184	8.23	210	7.2
Neutral	28	4.13	95	4.25	123	4.22
Somewhat disagree	68	10.03	84	3.76	152	5.21
Strongly disagree	528	77.88	1,554	69.47	2,082	71.42
Don't know	2	0.29	39	1.74	41	1.41
Not applicable	12	1.77	1	0.04	13	0.45
Total	678	100	2,237	100	2,915	100

Source of data: ERP

A higher percentage of school-going children in the slums (21 percent) said that teachers sometimes tried to have sex with students or even had sex with them compared to 6 percent of non-slum children reporting the same. Between boys and girls in slum areas a very similar percentage of boys and girl agreed that teachers often try to have sex with students (21 percent and 20 percent, respectively). This indicates that slum children are more likely to experience heightened insecurity from teachers as compared to non-slum children.

School sometimes provides protection to those who commit anti-social acts. According to one of the teachers interviewed, some students came to school and used the school as a hide-out from the police. Some teachers pointed out that guns were exchanged within the school grounds and they could not do much about it. ERP data seems to confirm the prevalence of use of weapons among slum children, as

8 percent of those asked admitted carrying a weapon to protect themselves at some time (see Table 3) Commenting on children who commit anti-social acts, one formal school teacher in Korogocho said that:

*... some of the things we have noted about them ... they don't like to be out of school. ... No, no those bad ones they do not like to drop out. ... They want just to be in school, and then just as they do their business.*

This may increase feelings of insecurity in school among students because the teachers are afraid to discipline students who commit criminal acts and they cannot suspend them from school. The ERP data indicates that 27 percent of slum children attending school, compared to 7.5 percent of non-slum children attending school, were of the opinion that at their school one could do almost anything without being punished. Inability to enforce disciplinary measures by teachers in slum schools allows criminal elements to keep using the school as a safe haven for their activities.

Boys who had dropped out of school also pointed to fear of assault by other boys at school as a possible reason for dropping out and also implied that teachers rarely if ever disciplined students who attacked other students.

*Moderator: Then I would like to ask about school, I would like you to tell me what things happen in this village or what problems make the young people stop going to school?*

*Respondent: Like the school where I used to go in Ngunyumu, you would find children would come to school with pangas [knives] and they would injure one another and the teachers did not get concerned – they did not even call the policemen. And if you inquire if the teachers called the policemen they said they did not since if they do then the teachers would be followed with pangas. Again, you find now that if a student had injured another, we would not be taught at school. You find a teacher would come to class and would just sit doing nothing. If you asked him why he was not teaching he would answer that teaching us is pointless because they still get their salaries even if they are not working.*

(Korogocho, boys aged 12 – 14, out of school)

Thus in both individual and focus group discussions, girls mostly spoke of fear of sexually related harassment as the reason for dropping out of school, while for boys it was mostly physical assaults.

### 3.4. Violence and Family Breakdown

Theoretically, the family is a source of security for all members who belong to that family unit. It is the site of social reproduction as children are born and are socialized within the family. The family provides the individual with a safety net and a buffer against outside pressures. The family provides the individual with a sense of security. When the family for any reason stops functioning then the individuals who belong to that particular family unit become generally insecure. One of the common factors that helped to explain why some children from poor families ended up dropping out of school was family breakdown or violence within the family. In some cases of violence within the home, especially in cases where the parents fight all the time, some children might prefer to stay at home to monitor the situation and protect one parent from the other parent. The following extract from an interview illustrates this point:

*Respondent: . . . after my parents separated, my father still used to come home and insult my mother, in our absence. So we chose to stay home to protect my mother and my sister used to help mother when father beat her up, she used to throw stones at father when he beat mother.*

*Interviewer: Throw them at your father?*

*Respondent: Yes, so he used to leave mother and pursue my sisters, this gave mother a chance to run away.*

Even where family violence did not result in a student dropping out of school it was frequently mentioned as something that would distract a student from learning and sometimes disturbed his or her concentration in class. When asked to explain what made it difficult for him to attend school, one respondent said:

*They would quarrel at home. My mother would want to beat my father, my father is very polite. My mother would hold my father's shirt and tear it off, then pack her clothes and go off, then come back the following day.*

*So that would annoy me, to such an extent that I would run away from school. I would run away from school to come and defend my father in case I hear that a fight has erupted between them.*

Children could not concentrate at school as they worried about their parents fighting. Children from homes where violence was the norm often felt responsible for their parents. The children's major fear was that their parents would kill each other or end up in jail and they (the children) would be left with no one to look after them. When violence erupted in the home school-going children could not study and do their homework. This also had a direct impact on their school attendance since such children would sometimes drop out of school because they were afraid the teacher would beat them for not doing their homework.

Violence within the home could lead to other forms of insecurities that would eventually militate against school attendance for children. In homes where there was spousal abuse, there was usually no pooling of resources. Usually, children from such homes depended on income from one parent which was not enough to cater for all of the family's needs, as a result perceived nonessential needs such as schooling were cut from the household budget in favour of immediate, essential needs such as food and housing. There is a vicious cycle between insecurity and poverty. Insecurity is a dimension of poverty as well as a cause for spiralling poverty since poverty can increase with increasing insecurity.

In the case of divorce, the chances of poor slum children dropping out of school increase dramatically. This is so because income sources for slum residents are precarious. Most of them depend on casual employment. In cases of married parents, if one parent was temporarily out of work there would be some income from the parent that was working, such that children would continue to go to school. However, in cases of divorce the children were more vulnerable as they were dependent on the income of one parent, and if that parent was out of a job the children would drop out of school. Even where the child was attending a free primary school, they would drop out to help their parent to look for food for themselves and other members of the household. The following respondent fell into this category:

*I started schooling at St. Elizabeth Primary School. That time my schooling was consistent and good because my parents were still together, my father used to work but he was a drunkard, and when he came home drunk, he used to cause chaos and harass everybody in the family. He used to harass my mother and us so much until we spent the night outside. One day, he came home drunk, he threw out everything from the house, and he beat up everybody. We had to run away for our safety because he had threatened to kill whoever he could get hold of. After he had thrown everything out, he went on and set all our things on fire. My mother had to start up buying new stuff for the house yet she had no money to kick start her new life. Now, at the school we had some school fees outstanding. This caused me and my sister who then was in class seven to be sent out of school because my mother had no money. The money she got from the casual jobs at the industries was spent on buying household items like bedding because we had nothing to sleep on. So I stayed out of school for many years.*

Thus although some children pointed out that they dropped out of school because of hunger, or because they did not have anything to eat, it would be short-sighted to just focus on this, because interventionist strategies designed to address the hunger in school such as providing food in schools might fail to have the desired effect. This is particularly so because normally it is not just one thing that makes students drop out of school. It could be several factors. For instance one respondent in the 12–14 age group said that she had stopped going to school because of the following four reasons: firstly she feared for her safety as some people had been murdered along the route she used to go to school; secondly she was always late so the teachers always beat her; thirdly, her parents got divorced and she and her siblings had to stay at home to protect their mother against beating from their estranged father; and, finally, at the same time, her mother and sister fell sick and she had to look after them and look for food.

### 3.5. General Community Insecurity

Sometimes conflicts which culminated in temporary but extreme forms of insecurity occurred within the slum communities. Although these conflicts were usually of brief duration the intensity of the violence unleashed could also

disturb schooling. However, these usually did not result in students dropping out of school, although schooling could be interrupted for many days depending on the intensity of the conflict and the perceived danger to the lives of individuals. For instance, sporadic “wars” (mostly related to the “Mungiki” gang – an outlawed religious sect that is often linked to criminal acts such as gruesome murders and kidnappings) that erupt within the slum areas may disrupt children’s education for a while. When asked about the things that happened within the community that would make some children drop out of school one respondent in a focus group discussion pointed to the issue of community wars.

*There is a way that war can break for example like from the area where I live. War breaks out, now you know you can not get out of the house, because your parents are refusing you to. . . Let’s just say it was only when there was the “Mungiki”. Now that was difficult because if you left the house you would be cut with pangas [knives]. Now you know, people would stay for up to a month without working because of the “Mungiki”.*

Although these village wars do not break out every day, when they do it can affect the children’s school attendance. It can affect many areas of the lives of people who live within the affected settlements. As in this case, some of the parents did not go to work for a month, resulting in food shortages and hunger within the family which could, in turn, impact on school performance. The Mungiki operate mostly in poor neighbourhoods and slums where, as mentioned, people do not have adequate police protection.

In some cases some boys feel very insecure because they are targeted for harassment by fellow villagers. This can also disturb their school attendance. In a similar finding in schools in the United States, Grogger (1997) writes that students who fear attack are more likely to miss school and to have their performance in school negatively affected. In a focus group discussion some men in the 25–49 age group had this to say:

*Again you know life in this place, you know this is a ghetto and the life in here, people fight a lot. Perhaps the child might wrong a certain boy and that boy perhaps his family is feared. You see.*

*Respondent 2: The child is now on the “wanted” list.*

*Respondent 5: The child is “wanted”, might even be beaten and might even be stabbed and it forces that child not even go to school. The security here is very low. We are completely insecure. You see it forces that child not to go to school.*

In one school in Korogocho in a period of one year one student had been stabbed and nearly killed, and another boy had chased another student with a knife within the school grounds; there were several students known to have guns, and teachers and students alike were afraid of them. Fights were also quite common in the school. At the same time the consumption of drugs by the students increased the violence levels at the school. As a result some children simply dropped out of school if they could not deal with the social climate at school.

Perceived increased community violence affected not only students' dropout rate but also the quality and quantity of education they received. Teachers were afraid to discipline students because they feared they would be attacked by the students or the students' colleagues outside the school system. Teachers often came to school late and left early because they were afraid of being attacked. Teachers claimed that sometimes students spied on them and “sold” them out to gangs. That is, the students would give relevant information regarding a certain teacher for a fee to a gang that would then improvise a way to rob the teacher. One of the teachers maintained that she had been robbed at least four times on her way home as the “matatus” (public buses) she had been using at that time had been carjacked by robbers. Most of the children interviewed were afraid that their parents might be stabbed to death at night on their way home from work and at least two respondents expressed fear of being stabbed whilst sleeping in their homes at night.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper has discussed how general security concerns can impact on school attendance. The focus was on how people's understandings and interpretations of events and occurrences, as well as narratives of risk, can impact on their actions. It is also interesting to note the role of embodied history and community repertoires in influencing people's decisions on whether to withdraw from school or not. The perception of insecurity may more often than not

influence how people act and behave regardless of whether the perceived threat is real or not. “Although perceptions of insecurity are not always borne out by statistical evidence, they fundamentally affect well-being” (Moser and Rodgers 2005, 4). Thus although girls might neither have experienced a rape themselves nor know anyone who had been raped, their perception of the prevalence of rape cases made them feel insecure to the extent of dropping out of school.

Informal social relations that exist between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, and between students and other members of the community, may impact on school attendance and dropout. Fear of being harassed by fellow students, teachers or other community members could make a student stop attending school. Reducing these kinds of insecurities could result in some children attending school who would otherwise have felt too insecure to attend. For example, community programmes that seek to make neighbourhoods safe, as well as informing students on how to deal with sexual and other forms of harassment within their schools, also make those children who would have otherwise dropped out because of fear stay in school. Generally programmes to make schools and communities safe for children will be able to address some of the security related fears that make students drop out of school.

As noted earlier in the paper, a discussion of insecurity should also invariably include a discussion of poverty. For instance, South et al. (2003) note that the socioeconomic status of a neighbourhood can impact on schooling outcomes, with children from low income neighbourhoods engaging in deviant behaviours that may cause them to drop out of school. These behaviours can include drug and alcohol use as well as the use of dangerous weapons. However this paper has shown that these behaviours – which may be caused by poverty and a lack of legitimate opportunities for success – may also result in increased feelings of insecurity for other members of the community including school children and adolescents. The attempt to deal with insecurity by pulling children out of school can be costly in the long run since these children are denied an education, further restricting their prospects of better employment which would pull them out of poverty in the future. Insecurity further increases poverty (see Mukui 2005, 34

Because the poor lack the institutional capacity to protect themselves from violence and harassment, slum children are more vulnerable than non-slum children to all kinds of insecurities. It has been noted elsewhere that school children who are confronted with regular violence can stop attending school as a way of avoiding violence (Irwin 2004). Community regeneration programmes and poverty reduction strategies may in the end also reduce some forms of insecurity that children suffer from in certain communities and improve school attendance and further reduce school dropout.

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