

The Causes of Primary School Dropout among Rural Girls in Morocco: a Case Study of Sidi Smail District

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Abstract

The present study reflects on the causes of primary school dropout among rural girls in Morocco. It takes Sidi Smail, a rural area in El Jadida province as a case study. The main goal of this study is to find out and discuss the root causes contributing to the problem and provide some recommendations in an attempt to fight the female dropout plight. The study opts for a qualitative research method, using a semi-structured interviewing technique. The causes of female dropout found in this study are related to financial circumstances, health problems, child labour, remote school, school related issues, girls' lack of motivation, parents' negative perception of female education, and early marriage.

Key words: Causes - dropout - Morocco - primary school - rural girls

Introduction

It is undisputable that education is one of the most critical areas of women's empowerment. The education of women is, indeed, an area that reveals some of the clearest examples of discrimination against women, particularly across the third world. According to a UNICEF report (1996), among children not attending school, there are twice as many women as men. Thus, offering girls basic education is one effective way of giving them much greater power by enabling them to make genuine choices over the kinds of lives they wish to lead.

The World Bank declares that education is a fundamental human right as well as a catalyst for economic growth and human development (World Bank, 2005). According to a 1996 UNICEF report, there are preponderant benefits to society as a whole as from women's education. The report stresses that an educated woman has the skills, information and self-confidence she needs to be a better parent, worker and citizen. An educated woman adds the report, is likely to marry at a late age and have fewer children. In this context, cross-country studies show that an extra year of schooling for girls reduces fertility rates by 5 to 10 per cent and that children of educated mothers are more likely to live a better life. More importantly, an educated woman will be more productive at work and better paid (UNICEF, 1996).

Former UN Secretary- General Kofi Annan declared during the Global Action Week of the Global Campaign for Education in April 2003 that "to educate girls is to reduce poverty". He stressed that there was no other policy more effective than the education of girls to raise economic growth, lower infant and maternal mortality, promote health and improve nutrition, prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, and increase the chances of education for the next generation (UN, 2003).

International conferences and declarations recognize the value of female's literacy and access to school. At the world forum (2000) in Dakar, 164 governments identified six goals to achieve Education for All (EFA). The fifth EFA goal concludes gender disparities in primary and secondary school should be eliminated by 2015. The focus is to give girls full and equal basic education. Likewise, the third UN Millennium Development Goal aims to promote gender disparity on all levels no later than 2015. This goal is one step out of eight to halve extreme by 2015. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that girls' access to school, like that of boys, is a fundamental human right. Thus according to article 26, everyone has the right to education (UN, 2012).

Being aware of the importance of girls' education and the obstacles that hinder the process of this education, this study tends to explore the root causes behind the girls' dropping out of primary school in rural areas in Morocco. The choice of rural areas is not random but relates to the high rate of female dropouts in these areas. This study takes Sidi Smail district in the province of El Jadida as a case study and relies mainly upon qualitative data. We hope that the findings of this study will help formulate policies at the macro and micro levels to streamline gender into primary education. We also hope that this study will provide a basis for policy intervention for the government, the private sector, NGOs working on women's education, and human rights activists.

The Review of Literature

Unfortunately, girls' right to education has been breached in a number of developing countries all over the world. Morocco is no exception, especially in rural areas where the rate of dropouts is high. The existing literature on girls' dropout of primary school highlights a number of reasons on top of which research studies underline financial circumstances (Birdsall, Levine

and Ibrahim, 2005; Boyle, Brock, Mace and Sibbons, 2002; Brown and Park, 2002; Bruneforth, 2006; Cardoso and Verner, 2007; Dachi and Garrett, 2003; Hunter and May, 2003; Ranasinghwe and Hartog, 2002; Vavrus, 2002; Hirakawa, 2012).

Another major cause of girls' dropout of primary school is related to school environment and safety issues. There are a number of studies which highlight issues of safety and dropping out of school, particularly within the context of teacher/student relationship. These studies make direct links between students' corporal punishment by teachers and dropping out, showing that such phenomenon continues to blight children's desire for school (Boyle et al., 2002; Hunt, 2007; Humphrey, 2006; The Probe Team, 1999).

The existing literature also depicts a link between girls' dropout and low achievement. Children with low achievement are more likely to drop out than those with higher achievement (Boyle et al., 2002; Hunter and May, 2003). Such low performance is related to a range of factors, including students' absenteeism, quality issues, household context, demands on children's time and so on. Low achievement at primary school has also been found to be a result of some school related issues such as teachers' absenteeism, large classes, the amount of schooling hours, pedagogical and didactic skills (Colclough and Tembon, 2000; Hunt 2008; Ghuman and Lloyd, 2007).

Gender related issues are perceived to be another root cause behind girls' quitting primary school. According to a survey conducted in Pakistan in 2001, one of the explanations for a higher dropout rate for girls is related to the parents' lack of education and interest in girls' education. For these parents, investing in the education of girls is a waste of money and resources as there is a common view that boys will earn and therefore support the parents financially after they get a job. By contrast, parents, especially those with low or no education do not see their girls working or bringing home any income when they leave home. They believe that once their girls get married, they will contribute to their husbands' income rather than to their parents'. This assumption among families perpetrates a cycle of discrimination against girls in terms of schooling. However, generally when either of the parents is schooled or when the mother is literate, there is a higher chance that parents would want to send their daughters to school (Khan, Azhar and Shah, 2001).

Another main cause of dropout is ascribed to the location of schools at long distance (Hunt, 2008; Hunt, 2012; Mernissi and Azziman, 1999). In the context of Morocco, although the government has made a concerted effort to build more primary schools in rural areas, there is a lot of work to be done, mainly in the remote mountainous areas where dwellings are scattered, which makes the problem even worse. In such areas, schools and hospitals are scarce and the existing ones are located at long distance. The absence of roads in these areas adds insult to injury. Thus, in such rural places where schools are at long distance and infrastructure is weak, children's motivation to continue schooling dwindles dramatically.

Lack of motivation is, indeed, another major cause behind the problem of girls' dropout. Given the high rate of unemployment among graduates, some parents feel less motivated to continue sending their daughters to school. Instead, they prefer to engage them in agricultural activities. There is, in fact, a substantial research literature on various aspects of child labour and educational access, including the relationship between child labour and poverty, the types of work children are carrying out, household structure and its impact on child performance at school. The literature depicts that there is a link between child labour and weak performance at school, and therefore a relationship between weak performance and children's dropout (Hunt, 2008).

Hunt concludes that there are often gender dimensions to vulnerability of schooling after parental bereavement. Girls often drop out of school to be caregivers to siblings. Research suggests that girls who lost mothers may be especially vulnerable with respect to schooling. Within a Moroccan context, a recent study by Christie J. Edwards (2010) finds out that many girls drop out of primary school as a result of child labour. The latter ranks as one of the highest child labour rates in the Middle East and North Africa. The study demonstrates that girls are frequently sent from rural areas to be domestic workers in urban areas. According to a governmental survey conducted on domestic workers in Morocco in 2001, 83.3 per cent of these domestic workers were illiterate, and only 0.6 per cent had ever reached secondary school (Royame du Maroc, Haute Commissariat au Plan, 2001).

The review of the literature also highlights early marriage as a root cause of girls' dropout of primary school. Hunt (2008) concludes that in certain communities, girls in particular are encouraged to marry as they reach puberty and become sexually mature. This finding is also confirmed by Boyle et al., 2002; Brock and Cammish, 1997; Colclough et al., 2000; Fentiman, Hall and Bundy, 1999 ; Rose and Al Samarrai, 2001; Syongho, 1998 cited in Archers et al., 2001).

Methodology

This study opts for a qualitative research method in collecting data. It particularly uses a semi-structured interviewing technique and a purposive sampling method. A total number of 35 in-depth interviews were conducted; 20 interviews with primary school female dropouts, 10 interviews with parents of primary school female dropouts, and 5 interviews with primary school teachers. My choice of interviewing female dropouts, their parents, and primary school teachers is justified by the reason that the problem should be dealt with from different perceptions. The girls are the concerned segment, parents (especially the father) are the ones who are responsible for taking the decision, and teachers constitute the sample category that provides data on research questions related to the primary school environment and girls' performance before they leave school. Teachers also constitute the connecting thread between the girls and their parents, and hence can explain the causes behind the girls' decision to quit school because teachers have a close interaction with their students at school.

All the respondents belong to Ben Ajem, a village located in Sidi Smail district. Sidi Smail is a rural area in the province of El-Jadida. The main source of its inhabitants' living is agriculture. I chose to conduct interviews in this area because it is my homeland and most of the informants know me in person. This fact helped facilitating contact and establishing trust with them. I started interviewing the dropouts I know. Most of them were so enthusiastic in accepting to be interviewed. They even suggested some names of old dropouts who also accepted to be interviewed. This allowed the study to formulate sort of a snowball sampling method. The same technique was used in interviewing the parents of dropouts. As for interviewing teachers, I went to Ben Ajem primary school where it was easy to meet teachers. The latter showed considerable cooperation for two main reasons. One reason was related to the importance of the topic under study, and the second was connected with my being an acquaintance to them.

The interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. Some were recorded by using a tape recorder. Others were written down when the respondents did not give their consent to tape recording. While interviewing, I let them recount their stories freely. I asked questions only when they would stop recounting, or when I wanted to direct the interview to a certain research question. I started with the informants with whom I had a relation of some kind like relatives

and neighbors. My niece who is also a dropout played a very important role in inviting her old classmates and friends to cooperate. She particularly helped me in explaining to them the nature of my work and the importance of their cooperation. After the interviewing task, I began to translate the recorded data from Moroccan vernacular into English. I had to be selective in order not to include irrelevant data. I did not have to stick to verbatim transcription. That is to say, I did not have to transcribe all the speech on the audio tapes, but only the parts of speech which are pertinent to the research questions. This method is quite widely adopted by social science researchers like Judith C. Lepadat who maintains that “the researcher chooses what talk to write down, and how to present it...the researcher’s challenge is to reduce the data selectively while still preserving the potential for ‘rich interpretations’” (Lepadat, 2000, p.205).

Findings and Discussion

The root causes of primary school dropout among girls in Sidi Smail found in this study are related to financial circumstances, health problems, child labour, school at long distance, school related issues, girls’ lack of motivation, parents’ lack of interest in educating their daughters, and early marriage.

Financial Circumstances

Ten interviewees stated hard financial circumstances as the main cause of their dropping out of primary school. These girls explained that they found themselves unable to continue schooling because their parents could not go on providing for school necessities such as textbooks, schoolbags and clothes, or because their parents wanted the girls to contribute to the family’s income by working as domestic workers. In this regard, Fatima (consent was taken from the respondents to use their real first names) who quitted school two years ago said:

I left school because my father was very poor. He couldn’t provide for my education. I needed books, new clothes and other things like my peers. My father couldn’t even provide for the necessary staples like sugar, oil, flour, etc. I thought asking him for new clothes would be an added burden

Hanane, a 13 year-old girl who has dropped out of school recently recounted that her shabby clothes were the cause behind her failure to continue schooling:

I felt embarrassed among my friends at school in the same shabby clothes; I had to wear the same clothes, the same shoes, the same schoolbag. My friends laughed at me. They poked fun at my clothes in the classroom and outside; I couldn’t bear it and decided to leave school.

Samira, a 14- years- old domestic worker in Casablanca, told me when I interviewed her during her 3 days break in Ben Ajem on the occasion of a religious feast that she dropped out of school (level 6) when her parents forced her to work as a domestic worker for a rich family in the city:

I wanted to continue my education to the end, but my parents were so poor; they wanted me to help them by contributing to the family’s income. I was brilliant at school. My Arabic teacher, upon hearing about my dropout, came to speak with my father, trying to convince him to let

me go back to school, but his attempts went in vain. What else could I do? My parents needed my help. They couldn't wait for years to reap the fruits of my schooling.

I had the opportunity to interview Samira's father. He related the story of his daughter's dropout and the plight of impoverishment. He concluded with tears in his eyes that "no father would want to see his daughter work as a maid (sakhara) in other people's houses, but what a poor man like me shall do. I have seven mouths to feed. May Allah curse poverty (qabaha Allaho alfaqer)."

Kabour, another poor father of six children recounted that both his daughters left primary school to be domestic workers in Casablanca. Naima quitted from level 4 and Souad from level 5. When I asked him about the reason which made him deprive his daughters of their right to education, he responded thus:

I'm old as you see (he is about 70 years old). I can't work as a field labourer anymore. My health deteriorated (saha mshat). I have no state salary, no free health care service, no retirement pension. Yet, I have to feed my children, and I have to buy medicine for my wife Halima who is suffering from a chronic illness.

The issue of taking girls out of school and sending them to work as domestic workers remains a serious problem in rural areas though the Moroccan government is striving hard to uproot it through taking some measures as providing lunch meals for students coming from far areas, transport services, distributing free school bags with textbooks annually and a sum of 100 dh monthly to certain needy families. However, some of these measures are not applied to certain areas. For example, in Ben Ajem school, the free lunch meals and the sum of 100 dh are not applied. This will lead us to recommend the urgent application of such measures in all rural areas. On another note, we suggest increasing the distributed sum of money because in a country like Morocco where a kilo of meat costs 70 DH, the distributed 100 DH is but a tiny sum.

Health Problems

Five of the respondents had reasons to drop out of primary school related to health issues. Karima suffered from a stomach-related illness and claimed it to be the main cause for dropping out of school. She said that she did not go to see a doctor because her father couldn't afford it. Her mother took her to a nearby saint's shrine called Sidi Ajem, but this did not cure the illness. Her health state became worse. Consequently, she had to leave school:

One day I couldn't stand on my feet; the pain was like fire inside me. I stayed at home for two weeks, then when I became better, I wanted to go to school, but motivation was too low because I felt that I wouldn't be able to catch up with my peers.

Had the school offered medical treatment, would you have stayed at school?

Yes of course. You know good health means good education.

This leads us to suggest that all primary schools in rural areas must be well-equipped to provide the necessary medical care for students. Daoui, a primary school teacher with 28 years of working experience, told me that the annual medical visit to primary schools scheduled by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Ministry of Education must be reconsidered. For Daoui and other teachers, there must be frequent medical visits and adequate free medicine must be available at school.

Meriam also had health problems. She suffered from vomiting and diarrhea, which made her completely miss out on classes for a month. After she had felt better, she wanted to go back to school. Unfortunately, she found out that she had missed a lot and could not catch up with her classmates, and hence decided to quit:

My illness was the reason why I left school. I was very ill and my father didn't take me to the doctor. I went on wringing in pain for a month.

When I asked this respondent whether she sought the public doctor through the school, she responded with an emphatic 'no' and explained that her parents said the doctor would only prescribe some expensive medicine they would not be able to afford.

Amina missed out school due to pain when having her period. The pain usually endured for three days at a time when she was at home recovering. When she went back to school, still having her period, she was worried somebody would see on her clothes she had a period. Amina related:

My periods were longer. Sometimes it took me more than 6 days to recover...the idea of fear that somebody would see it on my clothes didn't encourage me to go to school on such difficult days (liyam saaiba)...; I missed out a lot on my school. I was lagging behind, and finally I decided to quit.

Amina's case is indeed a convincing reason to push Moroccan educators and decision makers, especially within the Ministry of Education to consider the introduction of sex education in primary school curricular. This will make girls aware of their biological transformations and enable them to cope with these transformations in a healthy manner. Some girls, I was told, would even run to hide in empty corners at home for fear that they should be seen by their fathers or brothers. To alleviate the effects of such problems, I suggest that the Ministry of Education should take charge of distributing a number of sanitary towels annually to teenage girls. This will encourage these girls to go to school even during their period days. Also, they will stop using unhealthy traditional alternatives to clean themselves.

Zahra described her shortsightedness as affecting the decision to drop out. She found it difficult to see what was written on the blackboard. This made her write words incorrectly:

I suffered from bad eyesight; I couldn't see clearly what was written on the blackboard. I made a lot of spelling mistakes on my notebooks because of my shortsightedness...

I asked Zahra why she did not wear glasses. She replied that her father was very poor. Khadija, a 14 year-old- dropout, recounted that she had strabismus and that was the reason why she left school at level 6:

I didn't like the way my peers looked at me. They called me names because of my eye illness. They called me cross-eyed (lhawla). I couldn't bear it, and that's why I decided to stop going to school. My father wanted me to continue schooling, but I cried and begged him not to urge me.

School at Long Distance

For Hakima and Samira, one reason to drop out of school was the long distance they had to walk every day. They did not like school because of the long daily walks. They said they had to walk about 30 and 60 minutes respectively to school one way. Hakima explained she had to wake up very early in the morning and when she sometimes arrived late, she was punished by the teacher. She thought the morning walk to school was the toughest one. Samira, however, found the return harder because of being tired after a long day in school. Some days she had to stay at home to avoid the long tiring walk to school.

Bouchaib, a father of a primary school dropout, recounted that his daughter had to walk a long distance to school. When she reached level 6, he decided to put an end to her education though, he admitted, she was brilliant.

Why didn't you let her continue her studies?

The school was too far from home; Kenza (daughter's name) had to walk for about 3 kilometers four times a day because the school provided no free lunch meals.

Another reason that made this father hasten his daughter's dropout is related to his fear that someday some of the village's bad boys would sexually harass Kenza or even rape her on her way to or from school. This father's fear is, to my mind, reasonable and justified given that nowadays our media, print and audio-visual, are writing and airing shocking stories about school girls being abducted and raped heinously. A case in point is a 13-year-old school girl who was deflowered and murdered in a cold manner in the region of Fes on her way back from school. The news was aired on 2M channel in December, 2013.

Malika recounted that she experienced sexual harassment many times while walking to or returning from school. For her, this was the prime reason why she had to leave school:

More often than not I was harassed by the village boys, especially in winter when 6 pm was the beginning of dark fall. Bad boys would lurk in the bush, behind walls, or in the ruins of old houses... they would try to flirt with us, lay their hands on us, and run after us. I couldn't bear it and decided to quit school to put an end to this oppression.

School Related Issues

There are a number of issues which were perceived by the respondents as contributing causes to their dropout. Some respondents like Latifa, Zineb and Tamou said that they had to leave school because of weak performance:

- I was doing very bad at school and saw there was no need to continue.
- My grades were very weak though I repeated level 5.
- I was lagging behind, my marks were below the average and I couldn't understand what the teacher of French said, that's why I left school.

Other dropouts like Zahra, Habiba and Khadija related their dropout to the repeated beatings they used to face from the teacher of Arabic. They recounted that the teacher punished them severely by beating them on their hands and feet with a thorny stick. Zahra told me that one day the teacher beat her till her hands bled. To get more insights into the relationship between

children's dropout and teachers' use of violence, I asked Mohammed, a teacher informant, whether he and/or his colleagues used violence, and this is what he said:

To tell you the truth, I sometimes use violence. Most teachers here use the stick. We know it's illegal; we know it's anti-pedagogical to beat pupils...but what shall we do when all peaceful means fail to, for example, make a student do his homework?

But some teachers torture their students physically to the extent that they begin to hate school. Is it true?

Yes, this is quite true. These teachers need to reconsider their methods. I mean they need to mark the difference between slight and severe severe corporal punishment.

Some respondents mentioned the lack of some school facilities such as toilets. "How can a girl continue going to a school where there is only one toilet and this one toilet is out of service?" Souad asked rhetorically. In the same vein, Samira said: "boys could piss behind the school walls, but girls couldn't do such a thing... very few girls would dare to do so..."

Other respondents connected their lack of interest to continue schooling to their teachers' misconduct. As this dropout respondent recounted:

The teacher of French was a naughty person. All my friends hated him because he was unkind to us; for instance, he called us names when we performed badly in class...sometimes he didn't hesitate to call a girl 'a bitch!'

I asked this respondent to state other things she did not like in her ex-teacher, and she replied thus:

He smoked in class, and this made me and other students cough. He kept saying to me 'you are beautiful!', 'you have become a woman...!'

This respondent made it clear that sexual harassment at school was a serious problem which drove many girls out of school. Moroccan media have reported countless cases of such a problem occurring across the country, especially sexual harassment incidents perpetrated by young male teachers. Brahim, a father of a girl dropout, told me that the main reason which pushed him to put an end to his daughter's education was fear from some teachers' pervert conduct.

Lack of Motivation

Some interviewees ascribed their dropout to lack of motivation. Their accounts showed that their lack of motivation came as a result of a variety of social, cultural, educational and familial reasons. Zahra explained her case:

I had less motivation from level 1. My two sisters had dropped out before because there wasn't an educated family member who would help us with home assignments and encourage us to continue our education. While at school, I knew that someday I would quit.

In the same vein, Kenza recounted:

I repeated twice and my fellow girls reached the preparatory school (from level 7 to 9). I was still in primary school... I was the oldest and the tallest in class; I remember I fasted Ramadan (meaning she reached puberty). I felt I became a woman and couldn't make friends with my peers who looked much younger than I...; my motivation was very low, and finally I decided to quit school.

Halima told me that she had no role model in the village that would encourage, support and motivate her to go on.

In the village, there wasn't an educated woman who would serve as a role model. If there was one like a teacher, a doctor or an engineer, I would be motivated to continue and study hard... Besides, my parents were illiterate and showed no interest in my schooling.

As for Fatima, she said that she had a role model in her family. It was her elder brother Aziz who had obtained his B.A in 2001. Since then, he had been applying for a job, but all his efforts went in vain. This did not encourage Fatima to continue her classes. She asked rhetorically: "why shall I continue if unemployment is all what is awaiting me?" Souad had a similar view to that of Fatima. She stated, "many graduate young boys in our village couldn't find a job; this is really discouraging and motivation killing." Besides this bleak view to the future, Souad attributed her weak motivation to her bad French. She concluded that after 3 years learning French, she could not utter a single correct sentence in this language which is the first foreign language in Morocco.

Early Marriage

The link between girls' early marriage and dropping out of school is amply documented, particularly within the context of developing countries (Boyle et al 2002; Brock and Cammish 1997; Colclough et al 2000; Fentiman et al 1999; Rose and Al Samarrai 2001; Syongho 1998; Ackers et al. 2001). Early marriage or what is also referred to as child marriage is deemed a serious form of violence against women because it puts women and girls at risk of sexual, physical and psychological violence through their lives. In many cases, however, parents believe that it is in their daughters' interests to marry at an early age. They think that early marriage will protect them from spinsterhood and honour defilement.

The Moroccan context is no exception. Indeed, parents, especially uneducated ones, prefer to have their daughters get married at an early age, particularly when they are at the height of their beauty. At this age (usually in adolescence), a girl is supposed to have a greater chance to get married, and this chance is believed to dwindle as the girl advances in age. In this sense, many parents prefer to arrange their daughters' marriages as early as possible, because, as the Moroccan popular proverb puts it, "a woman is like an apricot, eighteen days and she is out of season." Such a proverb and other similar stereotypical sayings are still powerful in the Moroccan traditional mind. They construct a sort of misogynist discourse which needs to be eradicated, since it is pejoratively biased and it gives a patchy picture about women (Derdar, 2005).

According to field data, all the respondents who dropped out explained they had stopped going to school immediately after they got engaged:

- When I got engaged, I stopped going to school.
- I was 14 when they came to ask my hand; I told my father that I was not ready for marriage; he told me that they would wait for 2 years. I got married at 16, but quitted school at 14.
- I wanted to keep going to school even after my engagement, but my father suggested I should forget about it.
- My groom didn't approve of my continuing to go to school. I asked him about the reason and he said that the appropriate place for an engaged girl is the home.

Mohammed, a teacher in Ben Ajem School, confirmed to me the strong connection between early marriage and girls' dropout in the village. He stressed that it became a normal thing to see a girl quitting school just after her engagement. "Many girls left my class once they got engaged," he told me. He added, "one day I asked 'where is Fatima?' And a voice from the back of the room answered, 'she got engaged sir, she won't come to school anymore.'"

I had the chance to interview the father of Fatima. I asked him about the reason he married her off at an early age and whether he regretted ending her education. This is what he said:

I chose marring my daughter off rather than keeping her at school for years without good results (bla tayel)...I saw she would rather marry and make a family under the shelter of a man rather than to end up as a spinster in my house...

This father's view seems to be shared by a number of people in Sidi Smail where popular culture still keeps a tight grip on ordinary minds. For example, folk proverbs which extol girls' early marriage are rife. Thus, it is worth noting that any attempt made to fight the plight of girls' dropout should consider eradicating all stereotypes and negative images which debilitate women's right to education.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of this research study reveal that the causes of females' dropout of primary school are mostly similar to those presented in the literature review section. What is really specific about this study is the vocal stories of victimized girls who were forced out of school under the whip of hard circumstances, namely neediness and ignorance. It is also made clear that no single factor can completely account for dropout. There are various reasons which interact and make the problem a process rather than a single event. Indeed, there are a number of factors related to families, schools, and communities that affect whether a female student is likely to drop out or continue.

This study has shed some light on the root causes behind females' dropout of primary school in Sidi Smail. It is of vital importance to say that the findings of this study may not apply to other places in Morocco. What has been found is applicable to Ben Ajem, a small village in Sidi Smail where girls' dropping out of primary school is mainly due to poverty, health issues,

child labour, remote school, lack of motivation and interest, and early marriage. Of course there might be other causes behind the problem, but, according to the data collected, it seems these are the most preponderant causes at least in the village of Ben Ajem.

To fight the problem of females' dropout, the present study highlights the following recommendations:

- building more primary schools in rural areas;
- creating more boarding schools for girls;
- helping poor families financially provided that they continue sending their daughters to school;
- sensitizing rural parents about the importance of women's education;
- sensitizing rural parents about the dangers of child marriage;
- giving retarded students reinforcement courses;
- implementing severe penalties against misbehaving teachers;
- introducing sex education to help girls better understand their boy changes and deal with them in a healthy manner;
- implementing free lunch programmes at all primary schools in rural areas;
- implementing severe punishment vis-à-vis rape and/or sexual harassment perpetrators;
- the victims of sexual violence should be rehabilitated and given a chance to get back to school;
- laws banning child labour must be reinforced;
- teachers should work to create inclusive learning friendly environments and to encourage and guide learners on how to go about the difficulties they experience;
- primary school teachers need to keep getting in-service training to be updated as regards educational psychology and other pedagogical requirements;

The respondents believe that if these guidelines are taken into real practice, they will at least help reducing the number of females' dropouts. The teachers informants in particular lay emphasis on the role of the media, the educational system and the civil society in sensitizing citizens about the importance of women's education. This seems to be a long-term project because it is a hard thing to change people's mentalities, yet the fruits of this project are not far from being up for grabs.

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