

RESEARCH

**Transitions from primary to secondary school
and into higher education and work: girls'
expectations and experiences in Kenya**

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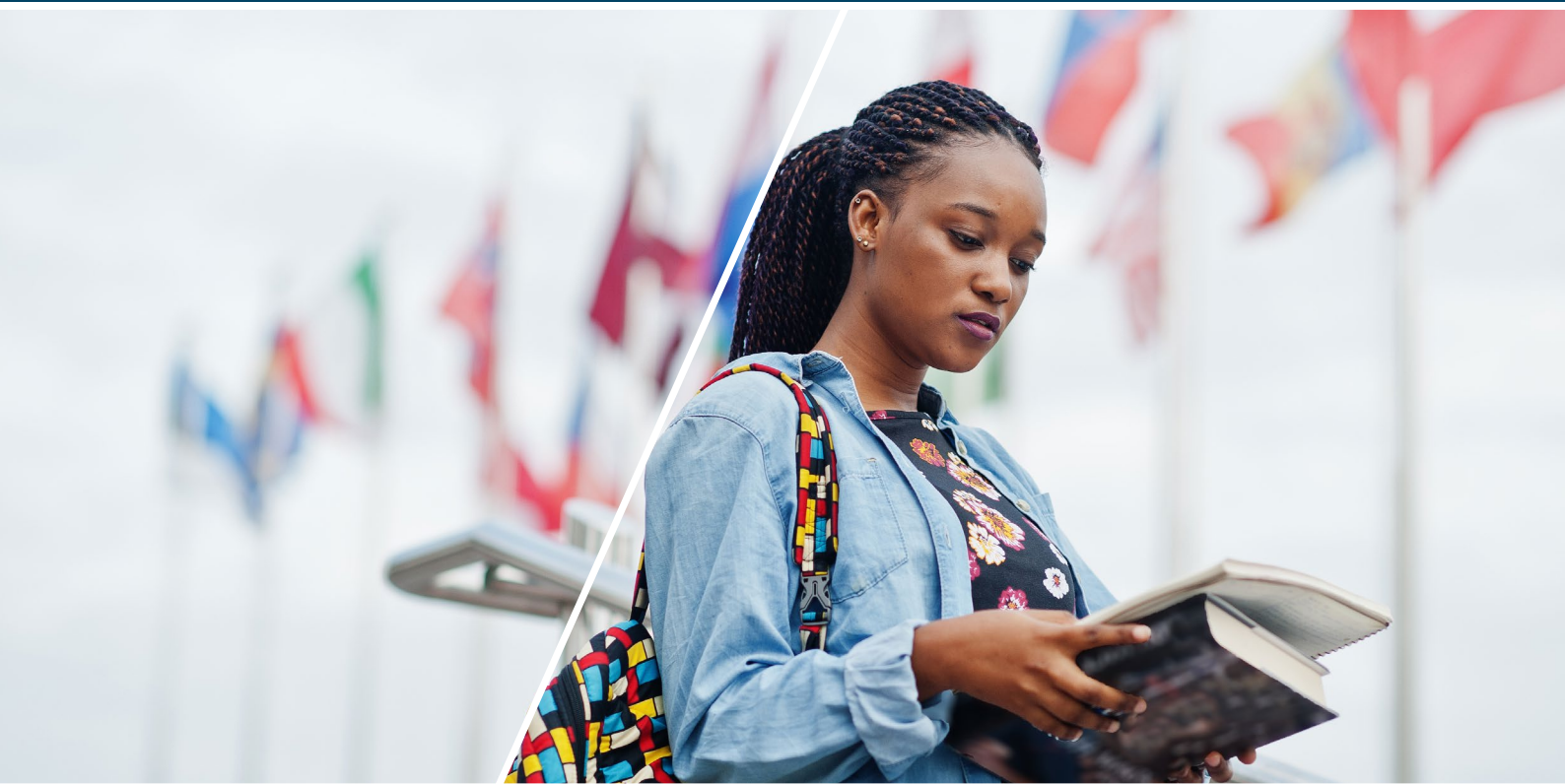


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About EDT

Education Development Trust is an international not-for-profit organisation working to improve education outcomes around the world. We seek to improve education – and transitions into work – through expert research on what works and delivering highly contextualised programmes designed to transform education systems, schools, and lives.

Our vision is a world in which all lives are transformed through excellent education. We combine global research and our longstanding expertise with regional knowledge to inform education policy and practice and deliver programmes around the world. Through our work and expertise – which spans from early years education right through to post-school careers – we seek to strengthen education systems, transform teaching and learning, ensure effective transitions into work, and contribute to global responses to key education challenges.

We improve national learning outcomes by informing education policy and putting our knowledge into action in our programmes and consultancy work. We work in varied contexts all over the world, in education systems as diverse as those in Brunei, Kenya, England, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Dubai. This often includes challenging environments, hard-to-reach localities, and marginalised communities where the need is greatest. In all these locations, we use evidence-based methods to raise education standards, deliver innovation in schools, help teachers to improve their teaching quality, empower educators to effect sustainable and cost-effective transformation in their schools, and reduce disparities in educational outcomes.

We are a trusted partner of governments, academics, and multilateral agencies across the globe. Our work helps to drive global understanding of education solutions, and we support global dialogues among international policymakers on education system improvement.

Our expert knowledge and programme design and implementation expertise are also deployed in delivering careers services in England which are rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, and in owning and managing a family of independent schools, in which we put our knowledge about excellent teaching and learning into practice.

To achieve all this, we draw on our programme of public domain research that highlights 'what works' in education reform, and invest in research and development to create globally leading and innovative methodologies, helping to make government ambitions for better education systems a reality.

Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

There is a growing evidence base showing that the transitions from primary to secondary school and from school to higher education and into work are periods of vulnerability, especially for disadvantaged girls in low-resource settings. Recent systematic reviews of girls' education have explored policies and interventions that hold promise in removing gender-related barriers to girls' school participation and learning in low- and middle-income countries.¹ There is limited evidence regarding what works in supporting girls' transitions across the education system and onwards into work in low- and middle-income country contexts. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on girls' education by exploring what works in supporting girls' transitions from primary to secondary school and into higher education and work.

This research is a three-year (2022–2025) project that provides evidence to inform policy and practice. The initial phase of the research was a desk review culminating in a publication on solutions to girls' transitions from school to higher education and work.² The second and third phases involve two waves of fieldwork adopting an extended case study design and following the same cohort of girls over a two-year period (2023–2024) to explore factors that support girls' transitions from primary to secondary school and onwards. This report represents the second phase of the research and broadly explores the experiences and expectations of girls regarding their transitions in West Pokot, Homa Bay and Narok counties. The research was guided by two main questions:

1. What experiences and aspirations do girls have regarding their transitions across education systems and into work?
2. What kind of in-school and system-level support are girls receiving to support their transitions?

The research design included focus group discussions and a survey with 263 girls selected from 22 primary and secondary schools that were purposively sampled. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including 17 caregivers, 21 headteachers, 21 teachers and three government officers. Alongside this, six young women working in traditionally male-dominated fields were interviewed to document conditions that support girls' transitions into work in challenging but in-demand employment sectors.

¹ Carvalho and Evans (2022); Psaki et al. (2022)

² Ameyia et al. (2022)

Key findings

1 Primary school girls overwhelmingly want to transition, but not necessarily for reasons of advancing their education.

When asked about the motivation for transition to secondary school, the highest proportions of girls were driven by (1) the ambition to go to a new school and (2) the chance to learn new subjects; 50.6% of the girls surveyed selected both of these answers. Nearly half of the girls (45.78%) were motivated to transition by the ambition to interact and learn with their counterparts from other schools.

These findings suggest a low level of ambition to transition for reasons concerning further study beyond secondary school, and underscore the need for sensitisation to teach primary-age girls, caregivers, and communities the wider benefits of continuing with education to a higher level and the value this can bring later in life.

2 Most of the primary school girls reported that they were prepared for transition. However, fewer were confident in their ability to exercise autonomy over their schoolwork, a key competence for an effective transition.

An overwhelming majority of the primary school girls (86%) reported that they were prepared for transition to secondary school. However, only some girls were confident about their preparedness in personal goal setting (41.57%) and responsibility over schoolwork (54.22%).

As children transition to secondary school, they are expected to have more autonomy and control over their studies, which includes setting goals for academic achievement and exercising responsibility over schoolwork. Schools need to provide self-directed learning activities to help children develop autonomy and exercise more control in their studies as they prepare for transition to secondary school.

3 Caregivers are a crucial support system for both primary and secondary school girls.

Survey results show that caregivers are the main source of information and support for girls who are preparing to transition from primary (63.25%) and secondary school levels (63.92%). A small proportion of learners receive support from siblings and peers, with an even smaller proportion consulting their teachers for information and guidance.



These findings demonstrate the importance of caregiver involvement in programmes supporting learners' transition from both primary to secondary level, and secondary onwards to higher education. Equally important is the need for further research to explore why learners are less likely to reach out to teachers for information and support when preparing for transition.

4 While secondary education is an important pathway for preparing young people's entry into work, less than half (42%) of the secondary schools surveyed were providing mentorship on employment and job searching.

The types of activities these schools provided included life skill training, job searching and resume writing, provision of labour market information such as employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship training. None of the schools were offering digital literacy training.

Effective career education programmes need to integrate digital literacy and transferable skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, resilience, and teamwork – skills that are in increasing demand in both the formal and informal employment sectors, as well as in lifelong learning.

5 Overall, financial constraint is by far the most pronounced barrier to transition from primary to secondary level and onwards to higher education.

Both primary and secondary school girls with caregivers working in the informal sector were four times more likely to face financial barriers compared with their counterparts with caregivers employed in the formal sector. Survey findings also suggest that girls with caregivers employed in the informal sector were less likely to receive caregiver support compared with their counterparts with caregivers working in the formal sector.

To help girls at risk of not transitioning to secondary level, this research suggests:

- » provision of scholarships that cover school levies and indirect costs such as that of instructional materials
- » remedial/catch-up lessons to help struggling learners improve their performance and have a positive attitude towards school transition
- » provision of comprehensive career education, including activities that prepare learners for adjustment to a more complex curriculum and new settings as they transition through education.



Background and context

The transitions from primary to secondary school, and from school to higher education and work, are among the most pivotal yet challenging periods in children's lives. In many settings, these are periods in which children's feelings of wellbeing, belonging, and academic engagement are challenged. Despite the vulnerability children experience during these transition phases, evidence also suggests that navigating these periods successfully can promote children's wellbeing and build a firm foundation for later success.³ For girls in low-resource settings, transition to higher education and work is correlated with benefits for the wider society, such as increased future earnings, increased political and civic participation, and reduced infant mortality rates.⁴

While some children negotiate the transition from primary to secondary school successfully, others struggle to cope with the emotional aspects of the school move and loss of friendships with teachers and peers from their previous school.⁵ In addition, changes in education level/pedagogy and heightened expectations from parents and teachers can amplify feelings of vulnerability.⁶ With puberty coinciding with the transition period, contending with the physical, emotional, and environmental changes simultaneously can take a heavy toll on children's mental health and potentially lead to disengagement or even disconnection from schooling.⁷

Transition-related challenges do not affect boys and girls equally. Overall, girls are at increased risk of experiencing adjustment difficulties due to concerns about friendships, teacher relationships, school connectedness (feelings of being a part of the school, the classroom, and friendships), and academic demands.⁸ As girls are more likely to rely on interpersonal support than boys,⁹ they tend to be more stressed when relationships are affected,¹⁰ which compounds the challenges experienced during transition. Indeed, existing literature has shown that girls' disengagement from school significantly increases during early secondary school.¹¹ This underscores the need for evidence on how girls can be effectively supported during their transitions from primary to secondary education and from school into higher education and work.

The research into girls' transitions is a three-year project that is part of Education Development Trust's wider research agenda in education, careers, and employability, aimed at generating publicly available evidence to inform policy and practice. The first phase of the research was a desk review that explored promising interventions that have been impactful in facilitating girls' transitions from school to higher education and work, in challenging contexts where girls are still marginalised from education (access, learning, and transitions).¹² The research follows the same cohort of girls during their final year at primary school, and then later in their final year of secondary school, to understand their expectations and experiences of the transitions from primary to secondary education and to higher education and work. This report is based on phase two of the fieldwork conducted in May 2023. The final wave of primary research will be conducted in May 2024.

³ Bharara (2020)

⁴ Rens et al. (2017)

⁵ Harris & Nowland (2020)

⁶ Hoang & Johnson (2022)

⁷ Johnson (2019)

⁸ Burns et al. (2019)

⁹ Rens et al. (2017)

¹⁰ Harris & Nowland (2020)

¹¹ Martin et al. cited in Burns et al. (2019)

¹² Amenyaa et al. (2022)

Statement of the problem

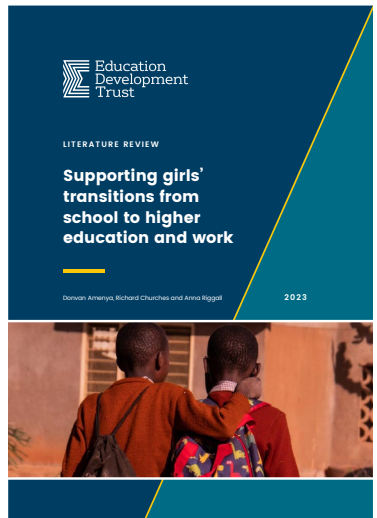
Given the significance of the transition periods in children's academic trajectory and wellbeing, research has pointed to the need for evidence on the kind of programmes and interventions that provide timely, comprehensive, and effective support for vulnerable girls. The role of schools in partnership with the wider community, as well as the active involvement of parents and other stakeholders, has been highlighted.¹³ Recent systematic reviews on transition focusing on high-income contexts have explored the impacts of the primary–secondary school transition on students' wellbeing,¹⁴ the impact of transitions on academic attainment,¹⁵ and risk factors to a smooth transition,¹⁶ as well as distress, difficulties, and concerns related to transition.¹⁷

In contrast, this research explores more broadly what works in supporting girls' transitions from primary to secondary school, and from school to higher education and onwards into work, in low-resource settings where they are likely to drop out of school or struggle to secure stable livelihoods. It goes beyond a narrow focus on interventions that primarily support academic adjustment and explores system-wide, individual, and household-level enablers of transition.

Objectives of the study

The overall aim of this study was to explore girls' experiences regarding their transitions across the education systems and into work. Three main objectives guided the research:

1. To assess girls' aspirations and experiences regarding transition during their final year of primary and secondary schooling
2. To explore the support girls are receiving towards their transitions from primary to secondary level, and from secondary school into higher education and work
3. To help policymakers and programme designers implement more effective solutions that facilitate easier primary-to secondary and school-to-work/higher education transitions for girls in Kenya and related contexts.



¹³ Riglin & Waters cited in Hoang & Johnson (2022)

¹⁴ Hoang & Johnson (2022)

¹⁵ Spernes (2020)

¹⁶ Harris & Nowland (2020); Burns et al. (2019).

¹⁷ Bharara (2020)

Research questions

1. What experiences or aspirations do girls have regarding their transitions across education systems and into work?
2. What kind of in-school and system-level support are girls receiving towards their transitions?

Scope of the study

This research drew on existing literature to define the key elements of successful transitions from primary school to secondary education, and from secondary school into higher education (college and university) and work. Research shows that two key elements enable effective transition, and these are the focus of this study.

1. **Preparedness:** Development of key competencies and skills, such as independent studying, goal setting, and critical thinking, which enable adjustment in different contexts (school, labour world, etc.) as children progress across the education system and onwards into work.
2. **Support:** This includes social, emotional, and informational support from parents, peers, and teachers, which helps in behavioural adjustment and easing tension and anxieties triggered by a transitional experience.¹⁸

Structure of the report

The report is divided into five sections, including this introductory section. Section two presents the review of related literature on transition across education systems and into work. Section three presents the study methodology, which includes research design, sample and sampling methods, data collection tools, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. Section four presents findings as reported by the surveyed girls, as well as from interviews with a range of stakeholders, including caregivers, headteachers, teachers, government officers, and young women working in male-dominated fields. Section five summarises key findings of the study and preliminary recommendations for policymakers.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Literature review

This section presents an overview of the national trends in the transitions from primary to secondary education, and from secondary school into work. In addition, it describes the international evidence on what works to support transitions from primary to secondary education, and onwards into higher education and work, as well as factors affecting transition.

Transitions from primary to secondary school and from school to higher education and into work in Kenya

Kenya has made significant strides in enhancing access to quality and equitable education for all, which is consistent with the stipulations of the constitution as well as the Basic Education Act (2013), which guarantees every child the right to a free, basic education.¹⁹ Owing to the investments and reforms in the education sector, remarkable progress has been made on access, retention, and transition rates. For example, implementation of various strategic interventions and policies, such as the school re-entry²⁰ and 100% transition policies²¹, contributed to improvement in primary school enrolment from 9.8 million in 2013 to 10.5 million in 2020.²² Similarly, the Pupil Completion Rate (PCR) and primary-to-secondary transition rate between 2016 and 2020 improved from 83.5% to 94.6% and 81.3% to 91%, respectively.²³

Despite the gains in access, there are disparities in transition and completion outcomes based on gender and location. A report by the Center for the Study of Adolescence²⁴ shows that, in Kenya, girls' transition rates remain lower than boys' in most parts of the country. In disadvantaged counties like Siaya, over half of the girls (57.6%) who complete primary education do not make it to the end of secondary education.

While Kenya's youth unemployment rate is generally high (35%), young girls and women are more likely to face difficulties securing employment compared with men.²⁵

Existing data shows that:

- » The average female rate of unemployment is 10% higher than the male rate
- » The unemployment gap is larger at younger ages than at older ages. At its highest point (ages 15 to 25), the female unemployment rate is almost 50%, compared with a male rate slightly above 30%
- » Young women often have constrained access to the labour market and the formal labour market due to cultural and social norms, average education levels, and time constraints due to childcare and housework.²⁶

¹⁹ Republic of Kenya (2018)

²⁰ Republic of Kenya (2020a)

²¹ Developed in 2018, the policy seeks to ensure that all children enroll in primary school and complete their secondary school education with a 100% transition rate.

²² Republic of Kenya (2021)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Muriuki et al. (2022).

²⁵ Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (2020)

²⁶ Republic of Kenya (2021)

What works in supporting transition from primary education?

Systematic review findings provide insights on the most promising period to intervene for a successful outcome. In particular, they have identified the primary school level as an important phase for developing skills and repertoire that are important for transition, such as learning independently in a more challenging curriculum with clear goals for academic achievement.²⁷ For effective transition, children require skills in three main areas:

1. The knowledge and skills to succeed at the next level (academic preparedness)
2. The ability to work by themselves and stay on task (independence and industriousness)
3. The ability to develop and maintain healthy and positive relationships with others,²⁸ which is developed through competencies such as communication, listening, cooperation, resisting peer pressure, and conflict resolution.

Interventions to support successful transitions can take many forms, including informational, tangible (e.g. financial support and provision of school materials, such as uniforms and books), and socio-emotional support. Overall, supporting students' sense of belonging and their socio-emotional functioning has been found to be an important enabler of transition from primary level. Learners who feel supported by teachers are likely to have a positive motivational orientation to schoolwork and experience positive and emotional wellbeing.²⁹ In-school support is, therefore, an important element for a smooth transition.

Factors that influence transitions across the education system and into work

Research on what works in facilitating effective transitions across different levels of education and into work has been approached from multiple angles. Recent work has drawn on the positive education framework, which focuses on factors that enable people and society to live a productive, satisfying, and prosperous life.³⁰ A dominant feature of the positive education framework is the view of effective transition as a process enabled by particular competencies and strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive during a period of change.³¹ Findings from recent systematic reviews adopting this framework show that the transitions from primary to secondary education, and onwards into work, are influenced by several factors, including:

- » academic preparedness
- » parental expectations and support
- » peer support
- » teacher and school connectedness
- » system-level factors.



²⁷ Rens et al. (2017)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁸ Spernes (2020)

³⁰ Bharara (2020)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (2020)



Academic preparedness

The transition from primary to secondary education comes with major changes in curriculum and workload. In most cases, children struggle to adjust to more specialised subjects, a greater volume of homework, more challenging work, and greater personal responsibility for their academic performance.³³ Research shows that such changes can trigger academic stress and anxiety, leading to further withdrawal from education.

Emerging evidence suggests that tailored support can help children to cope with the stress and anxiety triggered by transition from primary school level. In particular, transition is likely to be smooth if children are:

- » Academically prepared to hold more responsibility for their learning and develop skills for learning independently in a more challenging curriculum with clear goals for academic achievement.³⁴
- » Supported in learning to have autonomy over their studies, which, in turn, contributes to increased awareness of academic goals and the skills required to attain these goals, thereby enabling academic adjustment. Autonomy is nurtured when learners are provided with opportunities to develop skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, self-regulation and self-instruction.³⁵

Parental and family support

There is a strong evidence base showing that positive parental relationships, and parents' involvement in their children's education, can play an important role in facilitating the transition from primary to secondary school.³⁶ Learners with supportive parents and family are likely to experience a positive transition and have fewer anxiety symptoms.³⁷ In particular, learners are likely to experience a smooth transition if parents:

- » constantly communicate with their children about the transition, offer encouragement, and support autonomy
- » are actively engaged in the transition process, guide their children in school choice, and accommodate their children's concerns
- » hold regular dialogues with teachers and with their children to understand areas in which their children need additional help
- » are constantly engaged in school activities.³⁸

³³ Ameyia et al. (2022)

³⁴ Republic of Kenya (2018)

³⁵ Uppal (2019)

³⁶ Ameyia et al. (2022)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ameyia et al. (2022)

Peer support

Peer relationships become increasingly important during the transition phase when the need for a support system becomes amplified due to the interruption of both structural and environmental factors in children's lives. Good-quality peer relationships have been shown to assist a smooth transition, as children with stable friendships feel more assured and less anxious about the transition.³⁹ On the other hand, children who experience social anxiety due to lack of peer support are most likely to have difficulties with adjustment to the school move, impacting on their levels of distress across the transition period, due to the additional fears of social rejection they may be experiencing.⁴⁰ Peer support and acceptance is particularly important for girls, as they often struggle to form new friendships with a new set of girls.⁴¹

Longitudinal study findings show that peer relationships impact on transition from primary level in multiple ways:

- » positive peer relationships bolster mental health and emotional wellbeing, facilitating secondary school adjustment⁴²
- » peer connectedness reduces feelings of vulnerability during transition⁴³
- » peer acceptance is positively correlated with academic achievement through school transition⁴⁴
- » friendship is a key factor in building a sense of belonging, trust, and security during school transition.⁴⁵

Teacher support and school connectedness

Teacher–learner relationships are seen as the key route to supporting student wellbeing and providing students with motivation and protection against social-emotional challenges.⁴⁶ Research exploring pupils' experiences of transition and post-transition from primary to secondary school has shown that close relationships with teachers, in both primary and secondary school, can predict a positive transition to secondary school.⁴⁷ The importance of teacher support and school connectedness is further amplified by international evidence on students' voices about the transition process, showing that:

- » connectedness with teachers at primary school level helped students to manage relationships in secondary school⁴⁸
- » school connectedness was associated with positive mental health outcomes before and after the school transition⁴⁹
- » students who reported higher levels of school belonging in the final year of primary school also reported better levels of mental health at secondary school.⁵⁰

³⁹ Evans et al. (2018)

⁴⁰ Nowland & Qualter (2020)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Heinsch et al. (2020)

⁴³ Ameyia et al. (2022)

⁴⁴ Carvalho & Evans (2022)

⁴⁵ Ameyia et al. (2022)

⁴⁶ Tennant et al. (2015)

⁴⁷ Ameyia et al. (2022)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Vaz et al. (2015)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

System level factors

Girls face additional system-level barriers that negatively impact their transitions across the education system. Some of these barriers include:

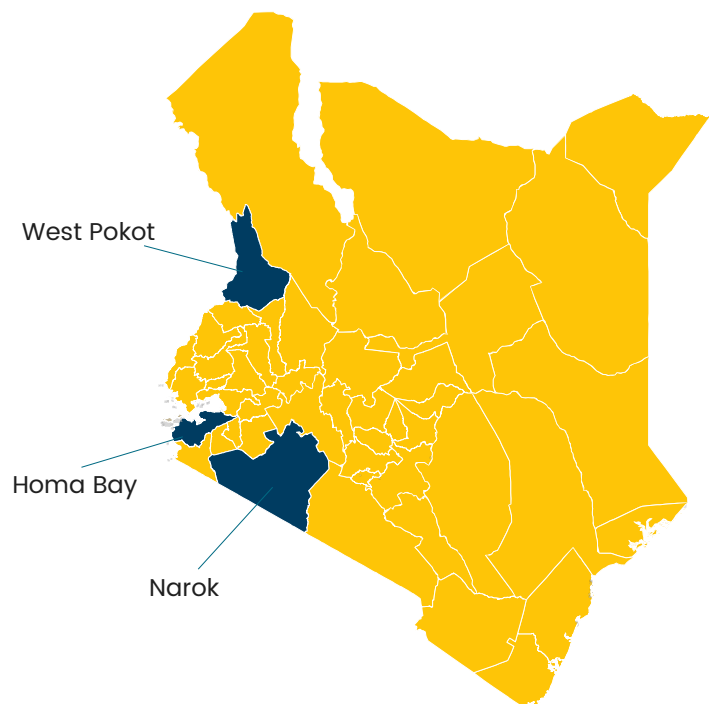
- » the direct and indirect costs of secondary education
- » discriminatory gender norms that undervalue girls' education
- » practices such as childhood marriage
- » girls' responsibilities to take care of domestic chores
- » sexual harassment and bullying
- » a lack of access to sanitary facilities or products at school.⁵²

Findings from research and programmes focusing on equitable access to, and relevant skills development in, secondary education suggest that girls' transitions from primary to secondary education and onwards into work can be effectively supported through interventions such as:

- » provision of targeted financing through scholarships and subsidies to facilitate access to secondary education for disadvantaged girls
- » supporting school retention for disadvantaged girls and provision of remedial/catch-up programmes on literacy and numeracy to help girls develop core foundational skills
- » integrating workforce readiness and entrepreneurship training into the school curriculum to prepare for transition to stable livelihoods
- » providing girls with relevant labour market information and supporting them in taking up courses in fields with high demand for labour
- » complementing vocational training with life skills and on-the-job internship/placement opportunities to enable girls to develop employability skills.⁵²

About the West Pokot, Homa Bay and Narok counties

West Pokot and Narok are largely agro-pastoral counties, with most of the population practicing crop farming and livestock farming. The Homa Bay County population depends on subsistence agriculture and fishing due to its proximity to Lake Victoria. The three counties are geographically classified as either arid or semi-arid (ASAL), a climate characterised by extreme conditions that can have devastating effects on communities' environments and livelihoods. Social development indicators in ASAL areas are low in comparison with the rest of Kenya due to various factors, such as the effects of climate change and historical marginalisation.⁵³



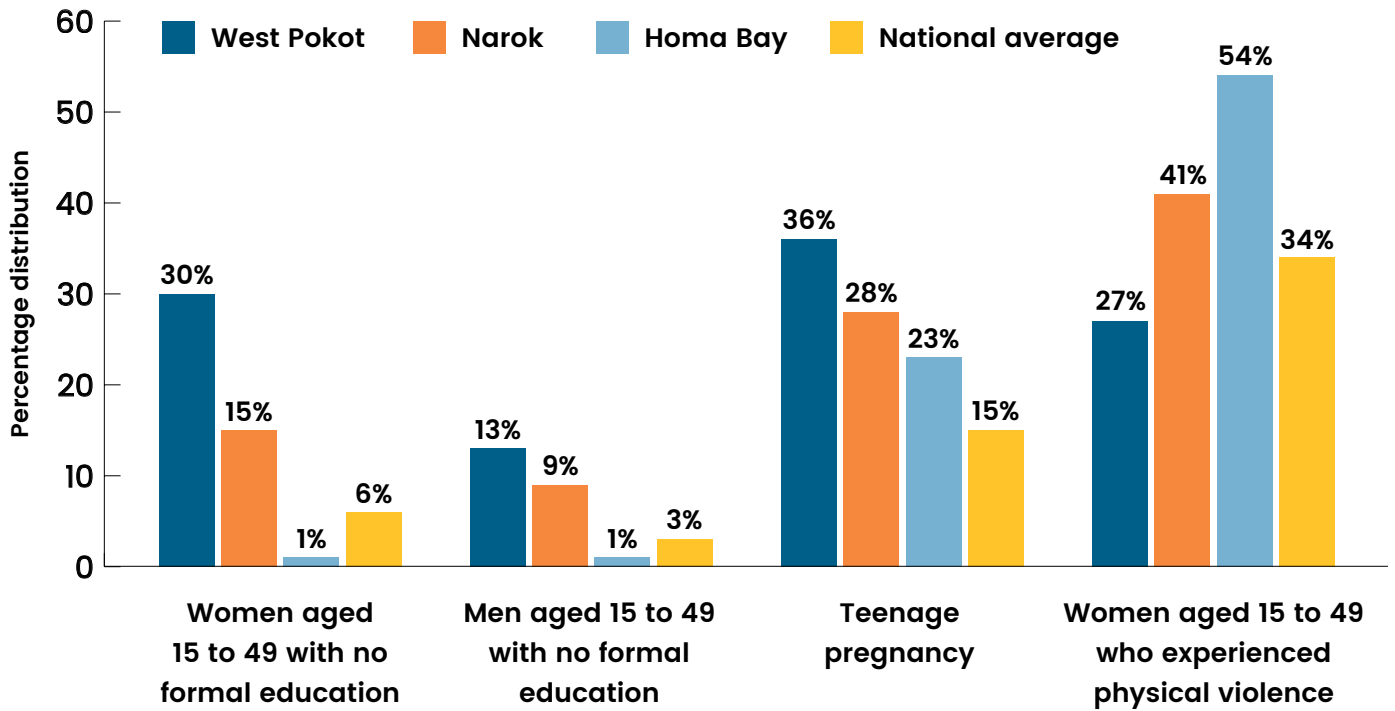
⁵¹ Abuya cited in Baxter et al. (2021)

⁵² Ameyia et al. (2022)

⁵³ Republic of Kenya (2020b)

Findings from the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) suggest a higher incidence of teenage pregnancy in West Pokot (36%), Homa Bay (23%), and Narok (28%) compared to the national average (15%). Among the three counties, West Pokot has the highest proportion (30%) of women aged 15 to 49 with no formal education. Figure 1 presents a summary of the characteristics of the three counties.⁵⁴

Figure 1: Social indicators for Narok, Homa Bay, and West Pokot counties



⁵⁴ KNBS & ICF (2023)

Methodology

This section describes the research design, sample and sampling methods, and data collection approaches. Data analysis methods and ethical considerations are also covered.

Research design

This study uses an extended case study design. We followed the same cohort of girls over a two-year period (2023–2024) to explore factors that support girls’ transitions from primary school to secondary education, and from secondary onwards into higher education and work. This report represents the second part of the research and phase one of the fieldwork. Exploring issues around girls’ transition in a systemwide context could help to unravel promising opportunities that can be leveraged to support effective transition, thus ensuring the recommended options are evidence-based, feasible, and sensitive to local dynamics.

The research design elements included a survey and focus group discussions with girls at the end of both their primary and secondary school levels, as well as interviews with headteachers, teachers, caregivers, education system leaders, and national government administration officials. In addition, interviews were held with young women working in male-dominated fields to explore conditions that support girls’ transition into the workplace. The selection of participants for the study was informed by findings from the literature review on the intersecting sources of support and information that show promise in facilitating effective transition across the education system and into work. Data collection was planned in two phases, with the initial fieldwork conducted in May 2023. The final phase of fieldwork, follow-up interviews, and a survey with the same participants, will take place between March and September 2024.

Sample and sampling methods

Data collection was carried out in the West Pokot, Homa Bay, and Narok counties. These counties were purposively selected based on existing data showing that girls in these areas face considerable vulnerabilities which are compounded by intersections of extreme poverty, practices such as forced marriages, and perceptions of low value attached to girls’ education.⁵⁵ A simple random sampling procedure was applied in the selection of girls who participated in the survey and focus group discussions. Headteachers from the selected schools supported the research team in the identification and invitation of parents who resided closer to the schools for interviewing. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the study sample.

Table 1: Study sample

Sample sub-groups	N
Teachers	21
Headteachers	21
Parents	17
Number of focus group discussions (FGDs)	18
Girls surveyed	263
Women working in male-dominated fields	6
Government officers	3

⁵⁵ Parsitau (2017)

Data collection tools

The data collection tools comprised semi-structured focus group discussion guides, key informant interview (KII) guides, and two sets of surveys. Separate surveys and focus group discussions were conducted with girls at the end of the primary and secondary school levels to gather information about:

- » their expectations regarding their transitions to secondary school, and to higher education and work, respectively
- » the kind of support they received from various stakeholders
- » challenges to transition
- » the support needed for an effective transition.

In addition, four key informant interview guides were used to collate the views of the headteachers, teachers, caregivers, education system leaders, and national government administration officials about:

- » expectations about girls' transitions
- » what schools and other stakeholders are doing to facilitate the transitions
- » challenges to transition
- » additional support required to make the transition happen.

Further, a key informant interview was administered to young women working in male-dominated fields to explore their experiences, motivation, and the kind of support required to facilitate girls' transitions to in-demand but often male-dominated work sectors.

Data analysis methods

Data analysis utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods. Survey data was downloaded from the KoboToolbox, cleaned, and recoded where appropriate. Descriptive analysis was conducted, and outputs were visualised using tables and charts. Qualitative data obtained from focus groups and interviews was transcribed and coded into a data template. Data analysis was done thematically, following principles of content analysis, by collating views from different respondents to illustrate such features as strength of opinion or belief, similarities between respondents, differences between respondents, and breadth of ideas.

Ethical safeguards

The research study adhered to Education Development Trust's Research Ethics Policy and its global safeguarding policy. A research permit was first obtained from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), in line with the government of Kenya's Research Licensing Regulation 2014. In addition, further clearance was obtained from the Ministry of Education authorities prior to entry to the schools.

Informed consent was obtained from respondents prior to engagement in the study. The process of obtaining informed consent included a full disclosure about the objectives of the study and emphasis on the freedom of respondents to withdraw at any stage. Names of respondents and schools were omitted in transcripts to protect their identities. To ensure confidentiality during KIIs and focus groups, interviews were conducted in safe spaces within schools where respondents were comfortable and able to speak freely with no one else able to listen. The focus groups were facilitated by a female researcher to provide an atmosphere of confidence and full freedom to express opinions, even on sensitive issues.

Findings

Profile of the participants

The survey was administered to 263 girls across the West Pokot, Homa Bay, and Narok counties, with primary school girls constituting 63.11% of the total sample. There were very similar proportions of girls living with both caregivers at both levels of education (62.65% for primary and 60.82% for secondary). For the primary school girls surveyed, only 37.35% of their caregivers had post-primary education compared with 24.74% for their counterparts at the secondary school level. A stark finding on the caregivers' labour force participation was the high level of informality. Overall, 73.39% and 79.71% of the primary and secondary school girls, respectively, reported that their caregivers were employed in the informal sector. The high proportion of caregivers in the informal sector suggests a minimal ability of parents to bear the financial costs of higher education, which may have implications for girls' transitions.*

Table 2: Breakdown of participants' backgrounds

	Primary	Secondary
Girls surveyed	166 (63.11%)	97 (36.89%)
Mean age	14.14	17.96
% girls living with both caregivers	62.65	60.82
% girls whose caregivers had post-primary education	37.35	24.74
% of girls whose caregivers were working	92.78	96.94
% of girls whose caregivers were in formal employment	26.61	20.29
% of girls whose caregivers were in informal employment	73.39	79.71

* Informal sector businesses in Kenya, popularly known as "jua kali," encompass a variety of informal traders and artisans who create goods and services for the market. Unlike formal enterprises, these businesses are not registered and fall outside the purview of various employment regulations, such as minimum wage requirements and social security contributions. Consequently, workers in this sector do not enjoy benefits such as sick pay, disability pension, or old-age pension, as they are not covered by the government's Social Security Scheme.

Local culture and prevalence of teen pregnancies

Communities in the rural parts of the Narok and West Pokot counties have historically had strong local cultures which heavily impact on girls' school completion and transition to higher education. In both counties, early and forced marriage is widespread and young girls have little say on when and whom they should marry. Fathers typically make decisions on marriage and girls are largely perceived as conduits to bring bridal wealth to their families.⁵⁶ Female genital mutilation (FGM), although illegal, is also common across both counties. In Narok County, for example, girls in rural areas undergo FGM between the ages of 11 and 13 years, and soon get married to a man chosen by their fathers, which effectively terminates their education.⁵⁷ There is a high prevalence of teen pregnancies (36% for West Pokot County and 28% for Narok County, against a national average of 15%).⁵⁸ Our survey results corroborate recent findings on the prevalence of teen pregnancies, with 79.20% of primary school girls and 93.81% of secondary school girls reporting that they were aware of a girl who gave birth to a child while in school.

“At the start of secondary, we usually have more girls than boys. However, the number decreases. By the time we get to form 4, the number could have dropped significantly. In the past five months, for instance, I have lost five girls due to pregnancies.” – **Secondary school teacher, male, Narok County**

Expectations of girls regarding transition from primary to secondary school

All of the primary school girls surveyed reported that they would like to transition to secondary level, for varied reasons. 50.6% of girls surveyed were predominantly driven by the desire to move to a new school; similarly, 50.6% were mainly motivated by the chance to learn new subjects and a new curriculum. Nearly half of the girls surveyed (45.78%) were motivated to transition to secondary level to get a chance to interact and learn with their counterparts from other schools.

Overall, these survey findings suggest a low level of ambition to transition for reasons of further study, which may be attributed to limited information on the role of secondary school in preparing for tertiary education. While completion of tertiary education enhances individuals' employability and lifetime earnings, qualitative findings suggest that the learners surveyed viewed completion of secondary school as the most important qualification for facilitating the transition to work and improving life outcomes.

“Secondary school certificate is the most important one. I need to proceed and acquire one.”
– **Primary school pupil, female, Homa Bay County**

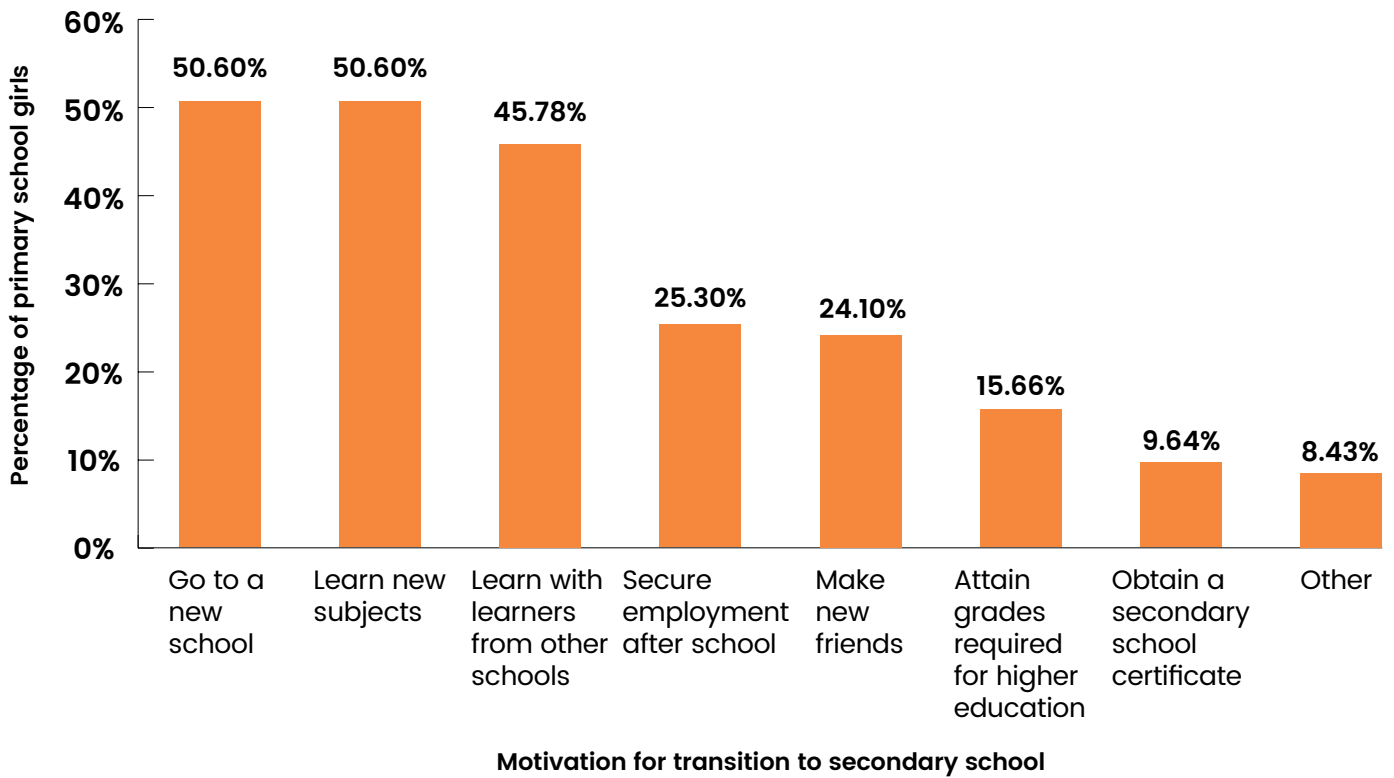
“I need to go to secondary school and get a certificate to better my life in future because I'll be able to get better employment.” – **Primary school pupil, female, West Pokot County**

⁵⁶ Parsitau (2017)

⁵⁷ Parsitau (2017)

⁵⁸ KNBS and ICF (2023)

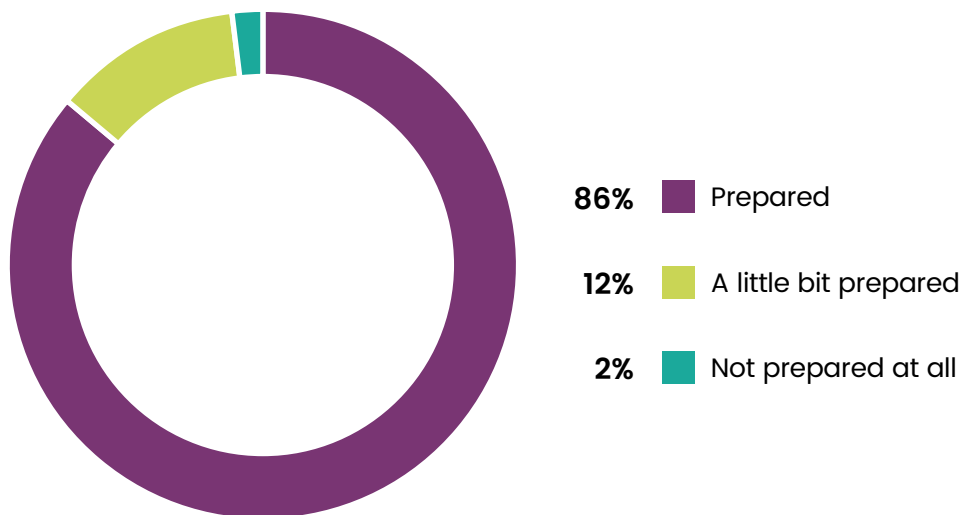
Figure 2: Motivation for transition to secondary school, N=166



Preparedness for transition to secondary school

A growing body of literature regarding school transitions suggests that children require adequate preparation for the transition to be effective. This research has drawn on the positive education literature which has extensively explored skills and competencies that help learners to successfully navigate the school transition phase with ease.⁵⁹ In particular, five dimensions of preparedness for transition were explored, namely responsibility over schoolwork, self care, goal setting, peer learning, and independent study. Overall, the vast majority of the primary school girls surveyed (86%) reported that they were prepared for a transition to secondary school. Only 2% stated that they were not prepared (Figure 3).

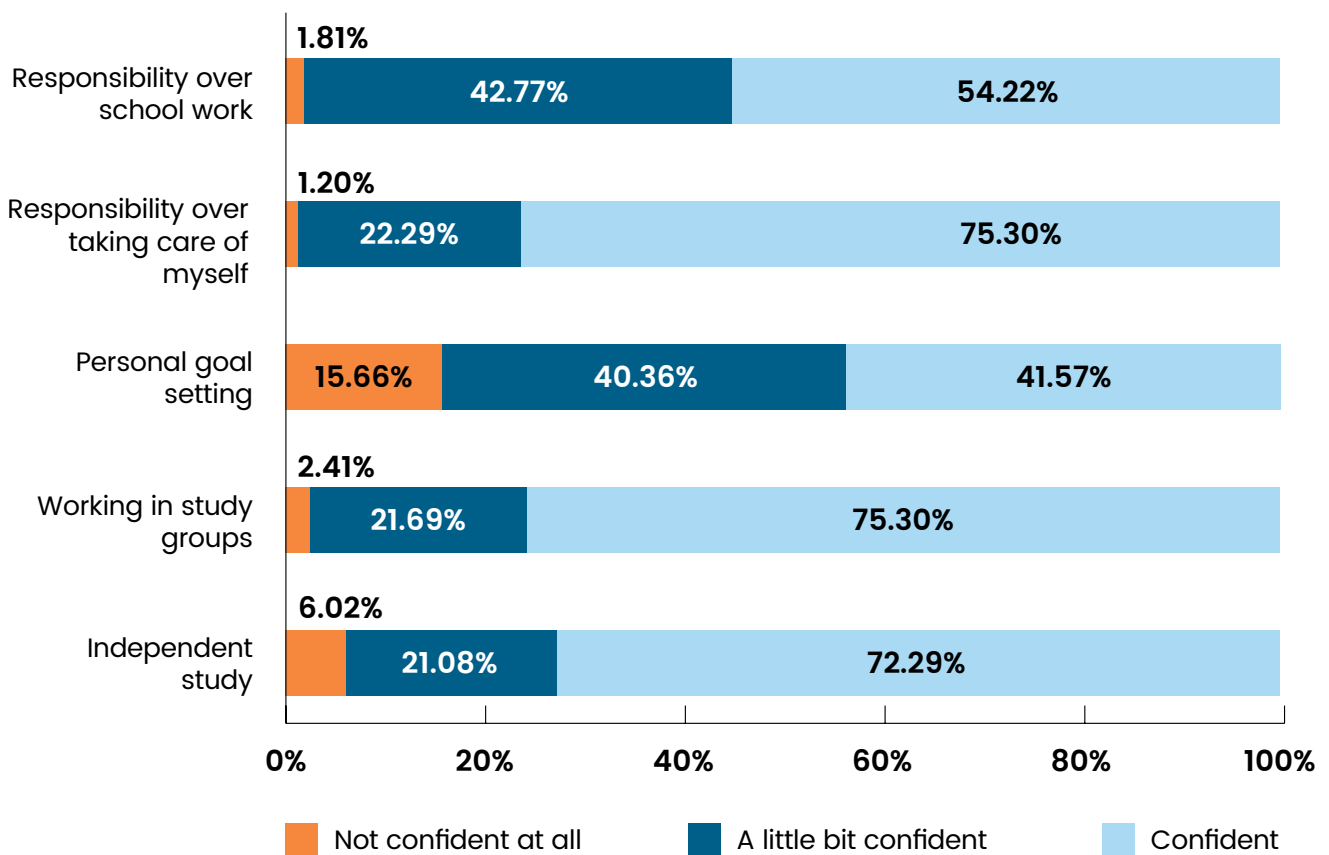
Figure 3: Level of preparedness for transition to secondary school, N=166



⁵⁹ Bharara (2020)

The level of preparedness for transition to secondary education was assessed by asking learners to comment on their confidence levels across the five dimensions on a four-point scale. The two areas in which the highest proportions of learners rated themselves to be confident in their level of preparedness were self care and working in study groups, with 75.30% of learners giving themselves a 'confident' rating for both of these aspects. Personal goal setting had the highest proportion (15.66%) of 'not confident at all' ratings (Figure 4). A low rating on personal goal setting is a possible risk factor for smooth transition, as the literature suggests that having clear goals for academic achievement is intrinsically linked to the development of skills for learning independently in a more challenging curriculum as children move to higher levels of education.

Figure 4: Preparedness for transition to secondary school, N=166

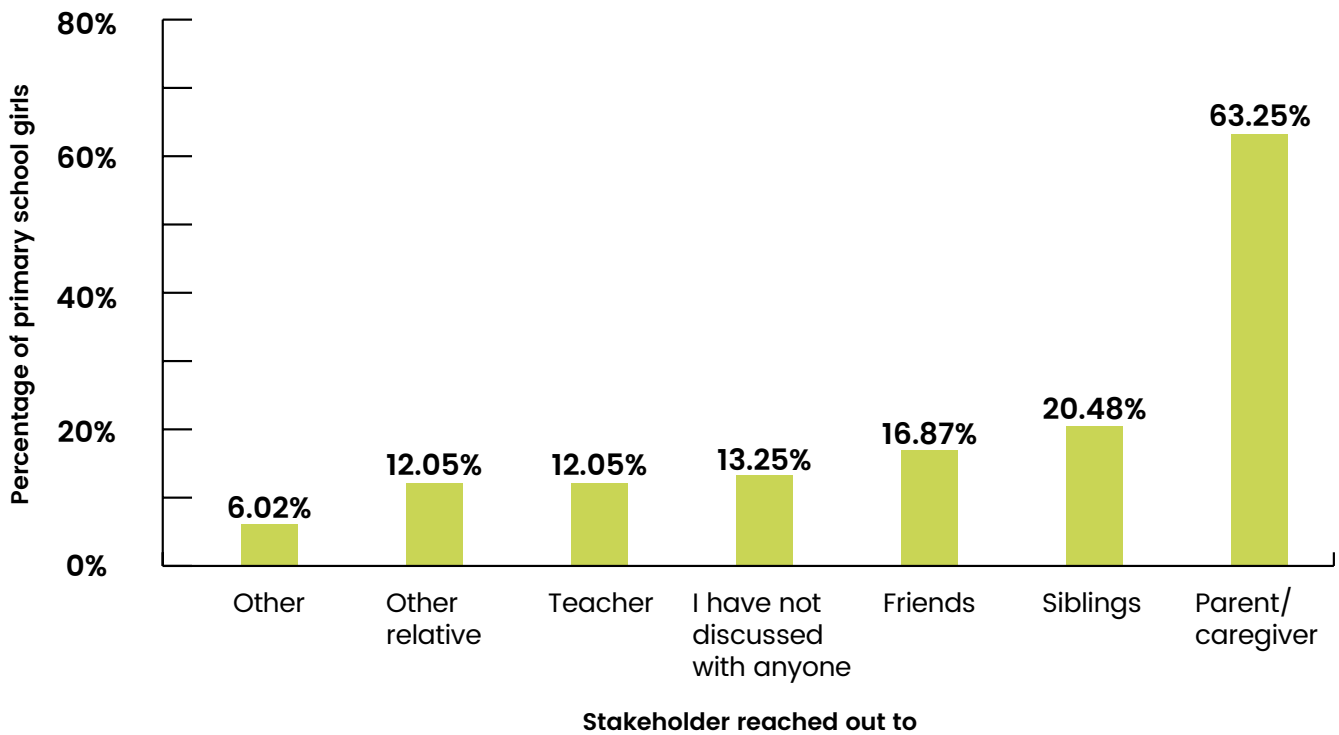


As part of the preparation for transition, existing literature suggests that having regular discussions with parents, teachers, and peers can have a positive impact by easing psychological distress and anxiety among learners.⁶⁵ Results from the primary school survey show that the main support systems learners rely on for information about transition to secondary level include caregivers (63.25), siblings (20.48%), and friends (16.48%). Importantly, 13.25% of the girls reported that they had not had any discussions on what the impending transition to secondary school would entail (Figure 5).

These findings demonstrate the overwhelming importance of caregiver involvement in programmes designed to support learners' transition from primary to secondary level. Equally important is the need for further research to explore why learners are less likely to reach out to teachers for support in preparing to transition to secondary school.

⁶⁵ Hoang & Johnson (2022)

Figure 5: People with whom girls had discussed their transition to secondary school, N=166



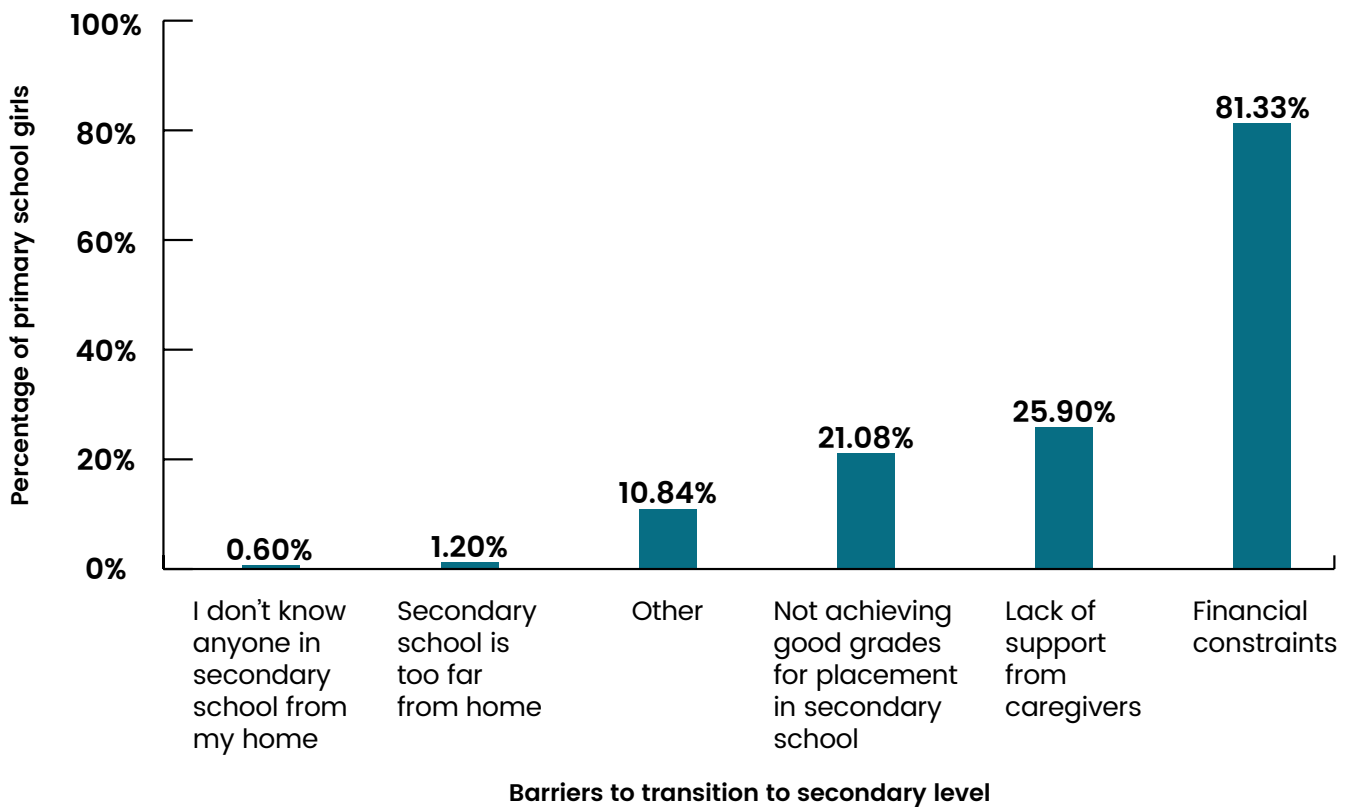
Barriers to transition from primary to secondary school

Financial constraint was, by far, the most cited barrier (81.33%) to transition from primary to secondary level. Other significant barriers reported include lack of caregiver support (25.90%) and not achieving good grades (21.08%). The focus on financial constraints may be explained by the high levels of poverty across the three counties,⁶¹ which is amplified by cultural issues such as the perceived low value attached to girls' education. Girls' comments suggest that when confronted with financial challenges, fathers in Narok and West Pokot preferred to send their sons to school over their daughters. For example, one primary school learner from Narok County said she was afraid her father might use cultural beliefs that keep girls from school and block them from transitioning to secondary school. There was also a concern that school fees could constitute a reason for a father to prevent transition.

The nomadic lifestyle of communities in the rural West Pokot and Narok counties presented additional barriers to transition from primary school. In Narok County, for instance, one headteacher reported that constant migration in search of water and pasture for livestock during periods of drought sometimes kept children out of school for longer periods of time, contributing to school dropout. In particular, the headteacher highlighted that the nomadic communities often settle in very remote areas without, or far from, schools. This contributed to school dropouts, with the girls ending up in marriages within their settlements. The challenges that come with constant migration of communities were amplified by cross-border movements, which presented additional barriers to tracing the girls in a different jurisdiction.

⁶¹ Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (2020)

Figure 6: Barriers to transition from primary to secondary school, N=166



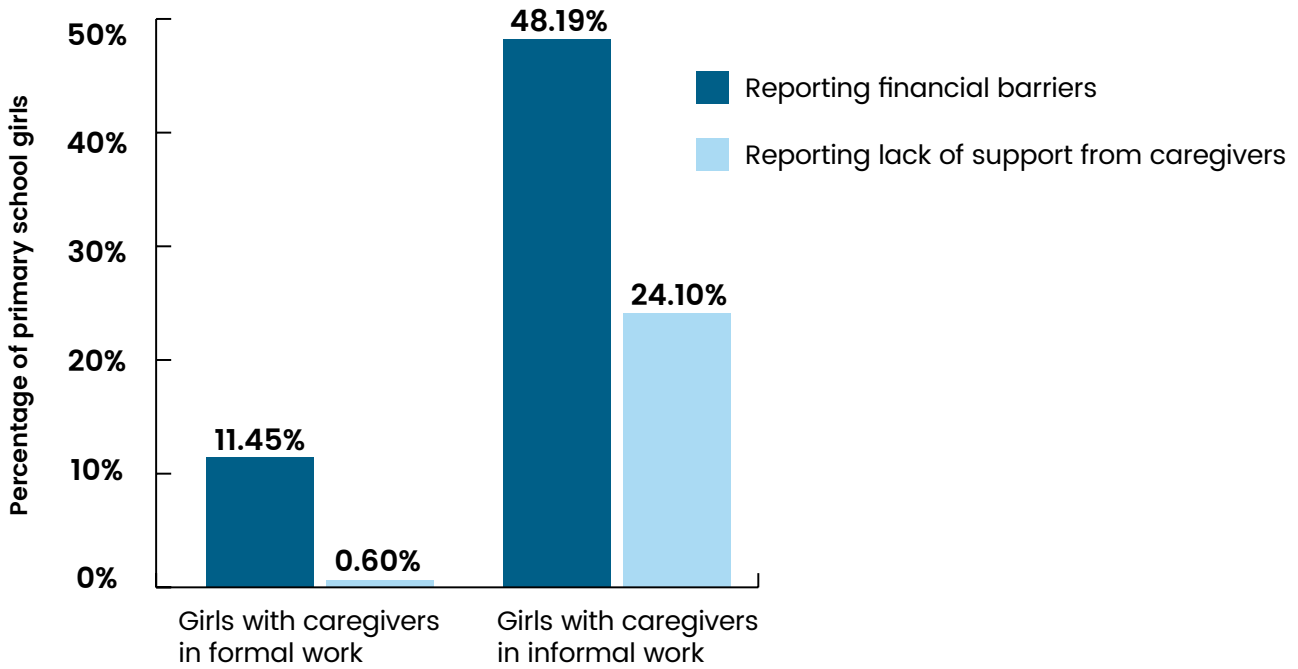
Barriers to transition from primary school by socioeconomic background

Girls with caregivers working in the informal sector were four times (48.19%) more likely to report financial barriers compared with those whose caregivers were working in the formal sector (11.45%). In addition, survey findings suggest that any vulnerabilities that girls faced in their transition from primary to secondary school were amplified by their primary caregivers' occupations. For example, lack of caregiver support was more prevalent among girls with caregivers employed in the informal sector (24.10%) than those whose caregivers worked in the formal sector (0.60%). These findings should be interpreted with caution, given that caregivers' inability to meet financial costs of education could be misinterpreted by learners as lack of commitment or support. The main forms of caregiver support reported included a firm commitment to girls' education (comparable to their support for boys) and encouraging girls to pursue secondary education.

“[What would help me to transition to secondary school is] encouragement that they will support me to go to secondary school.” – Primary school pupil, female, Narok County

“[I'd like my caregivers to] assure me that if I pass my final exams, I'll go to secondary, which to me is a supportive assurance.” – Primary school pupil, female, Narok County

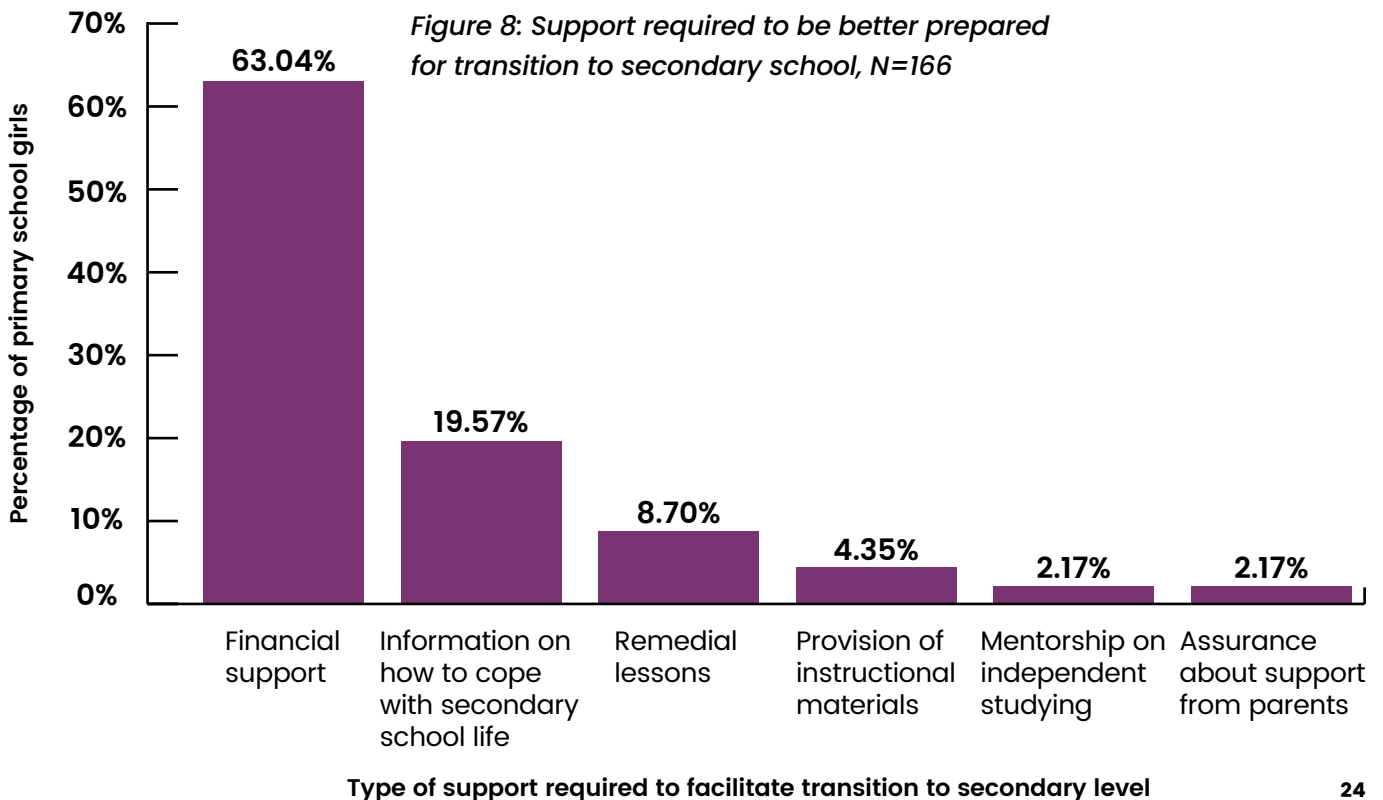
Figure 7: Barriers to transition to secondary school by caregivers' type of work, N=166



Girls' perceptions of support required to be better prepared for transition to secondary school

The primary school girls surveyed were asked what kind of support they required to be better prepared for the transition to secondary school. The forms of assistance that girls cited the most were financial support (63.04%), information on how to cope with secondary school life (19.57%), and remedial lessons (8.7%) to better prepare academically for transition to secondary school. The high proportion of girls reportedly requiring financial support is consistent with the findings on barriers to transition, given that financial constraint was the most cited challenge (81.33%). Qualitative findings pointed to the importance of ensuring that schools can accommodate children with special needs to facilitate effective transition to secondary school for girls with disabilities.

Figure 8: Support required to be better prepared for transition to secondary school, N=166



Expectations of girls regarding transition from secondary school to higher education

Survey results suggest that attending university was the most preferred (59.79%) post-secondary school transition option. On the other hand, 20.62% of the girls surveyed reported that they would like to attend TVET (technical and vocational education and training). While an overwhelming majority of the girls surveyed reported that they aspired to continue with post-secondary education, less than a quarter (22.68%) were certain about this continuation. This suggests that barriers exist beyond learners' control, hence the need for prior planning by various stakeholders to facilitate a smooth transition to higher education.

Table 3: Aspirations of girls regarding post-secondary education, N=97

Aspirations regarding post-secondary education	
Attend university	59.79%
Attend TVET/college/polytechnic	20.62%
Search for employment	1.03%
I do not know yet	3.09%
Probability of continuing with education post-secondary level	
Not very likely; I don't think I will do this	11.34%
Somewhat likely; I might do this	22.68%
Likely	20.62%
Very likely	45.36%

Motivation to pursue higher education

When asked about their motivation for pursuing higher education, secondary school girls reported the need for earning a certification (65.98%), developing skills needed to secure employment (55.67%), and learning a course of choice (44.33%). These findings are remarkably different from the primary school survey results on motivation for transition, and they reflect the wider recognition of the importance of secondary education as a pathway to higher education, entry into the workforce, and fulfilment of career goals and aspirations. While these three outcomes are closely interlinked, qualitative findings suggest that the girls' motivation for pursuing higher education was also largely influenced by their socioeconomic background in a variety of ways.

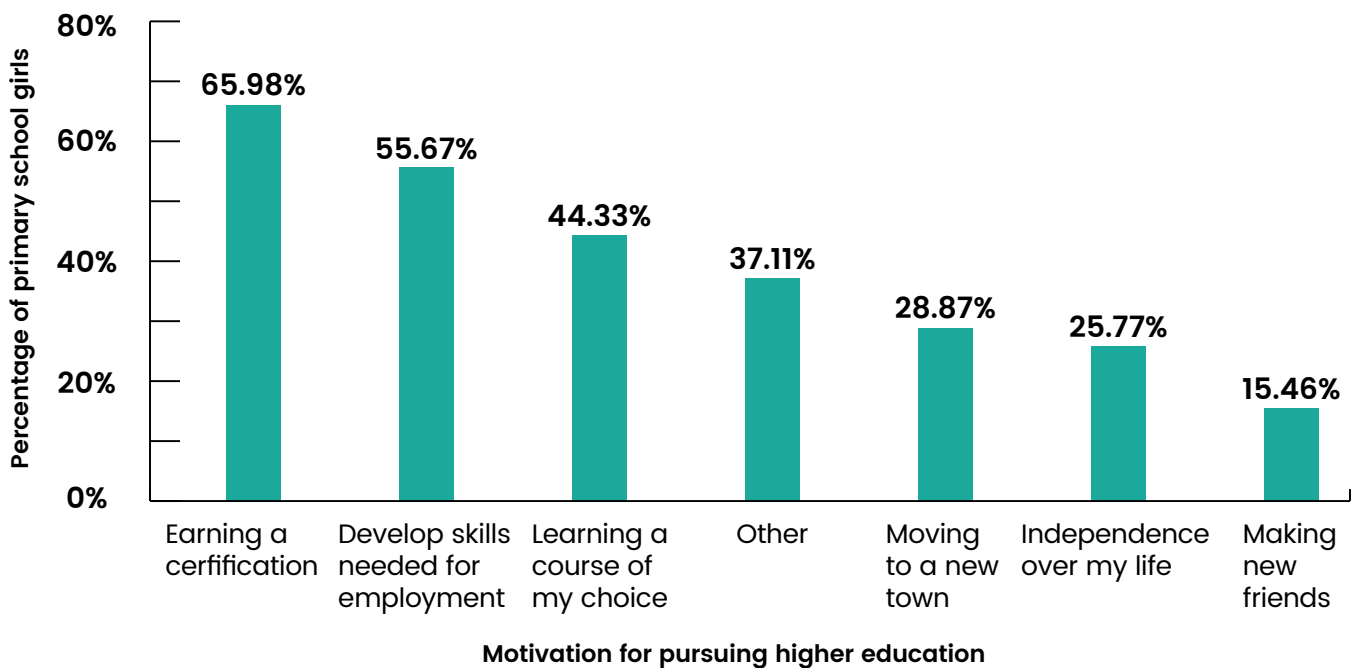
Many of the girls surveyed were conscious of pervasive poverty in their homes and viewed higher education as the only pathway to securing employment for a better future. Not surprisingly, helping their parents, improving quality of life in their families by supporting a shift to more secure livelihoods, and leading a better life came up consistently during discussions with the girls across the three counties.

“[I am] motivated to go to university and get work to help my parents. Life is very hard at home.”
 – Secondary school student, female, West Pokot County

“[I want] to be able to get a formal employment and break the cycle of fishing work in my family.”
 – Secondary school student, female, Homa Bay County

“[I have] the desire to uplift my parents and family from poverty, because I know I’ll get a good job if I have a degree.” – Secondary school student, female, Narok County

Figure 9: Motivation for pursuing higher education, N=97

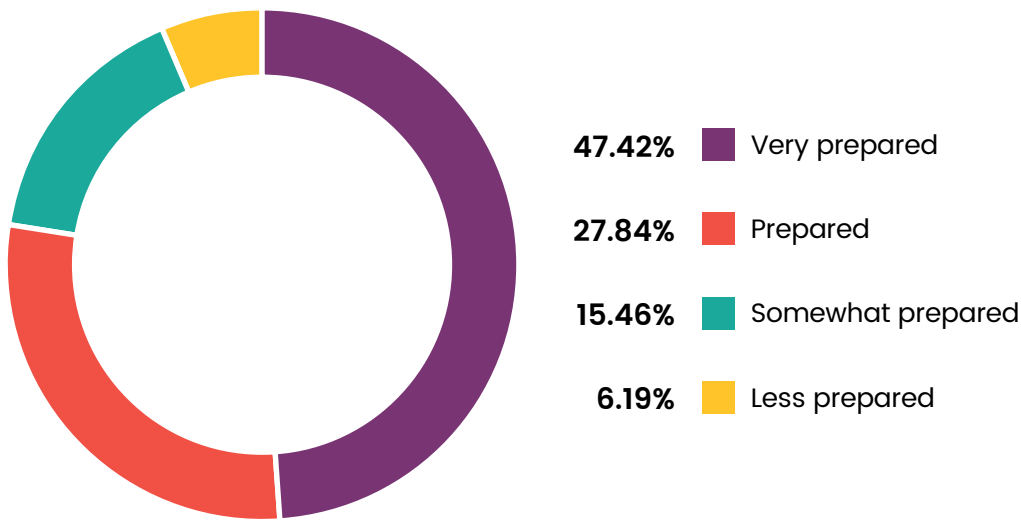


Preparedness for transition to higher education

Nearly half (47.42%) of the secondary school girls surveyed were confident of their preparedness for transition to higher education. Only 6.19% of the girls reported that they were less prepared for the transition (Figure 10). Some of the reasons cited for being less prepared include uncertainties about accessing funding for higher education, low academic performance, adjusting to fast-paced higher education institutional set-ups, and challenges of getting along with more experienced learners from privileged backgrounds. Coming from a rural context appeared to trigger some anxiety regarding transition to higher education.

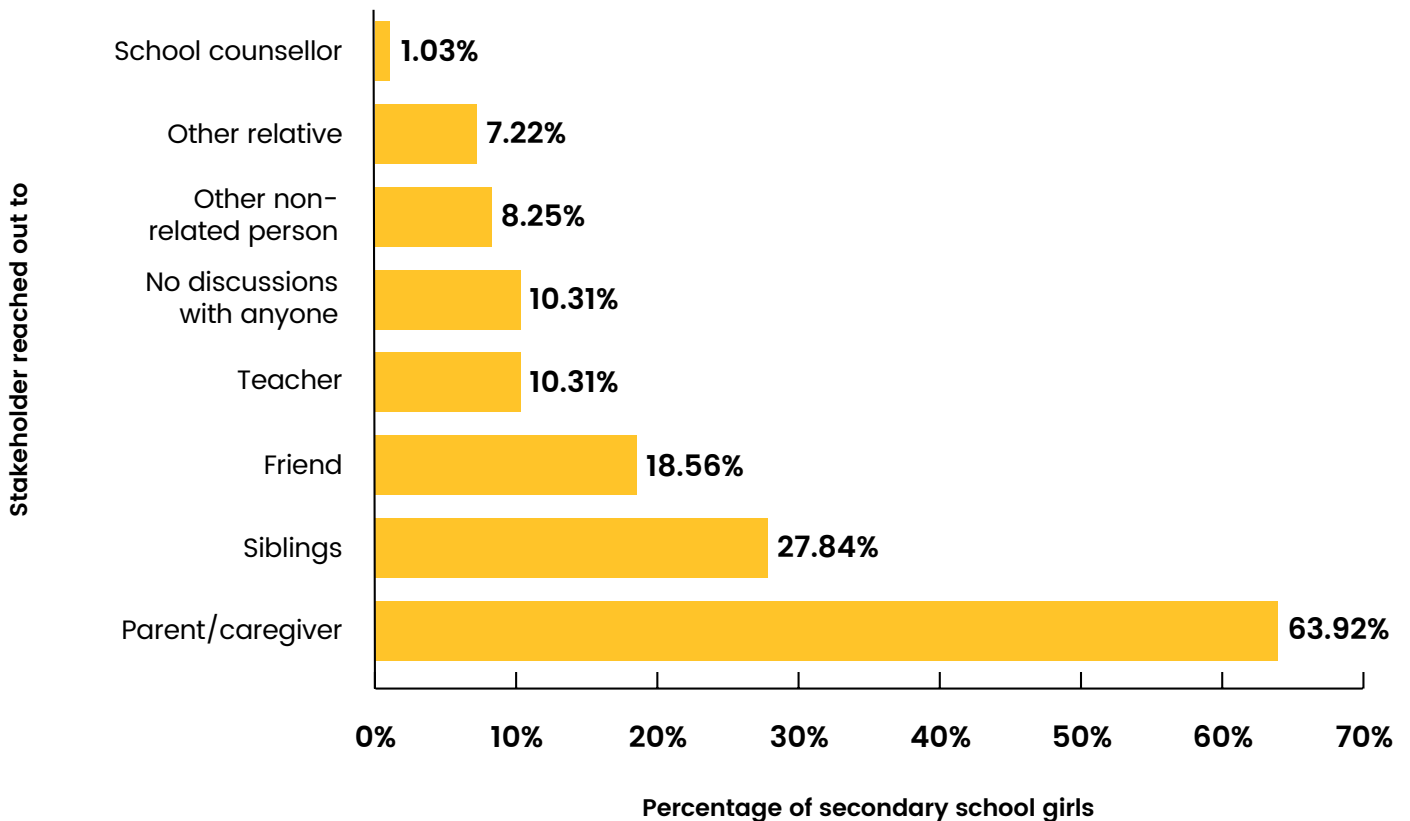
“Because I don’t know what to expect and am told it can be difficult for people who come from rural areas, I therefore feel unprepared, especially in dealing with how other people will judge me when I join the university.” – Secondary school student, female, West Pokot County

Figure 10: Preparedness for transition to higher education/college, N=97



In assessing preparation for post-secondary education, the research explored the extent to which the girls had reached out to others for information and advice about available options. Consistent with the primary school survey findings, caregivers form the main support system (63.92%) that the girls often consult regarding post-secondary options. Nearly a third (27.84%) of the secondary school girls relied on siblings for information about their future transitions (Figure 11). These findings demonstrate the need for research on how teachers can play a more proactive role in supporting the transition process.

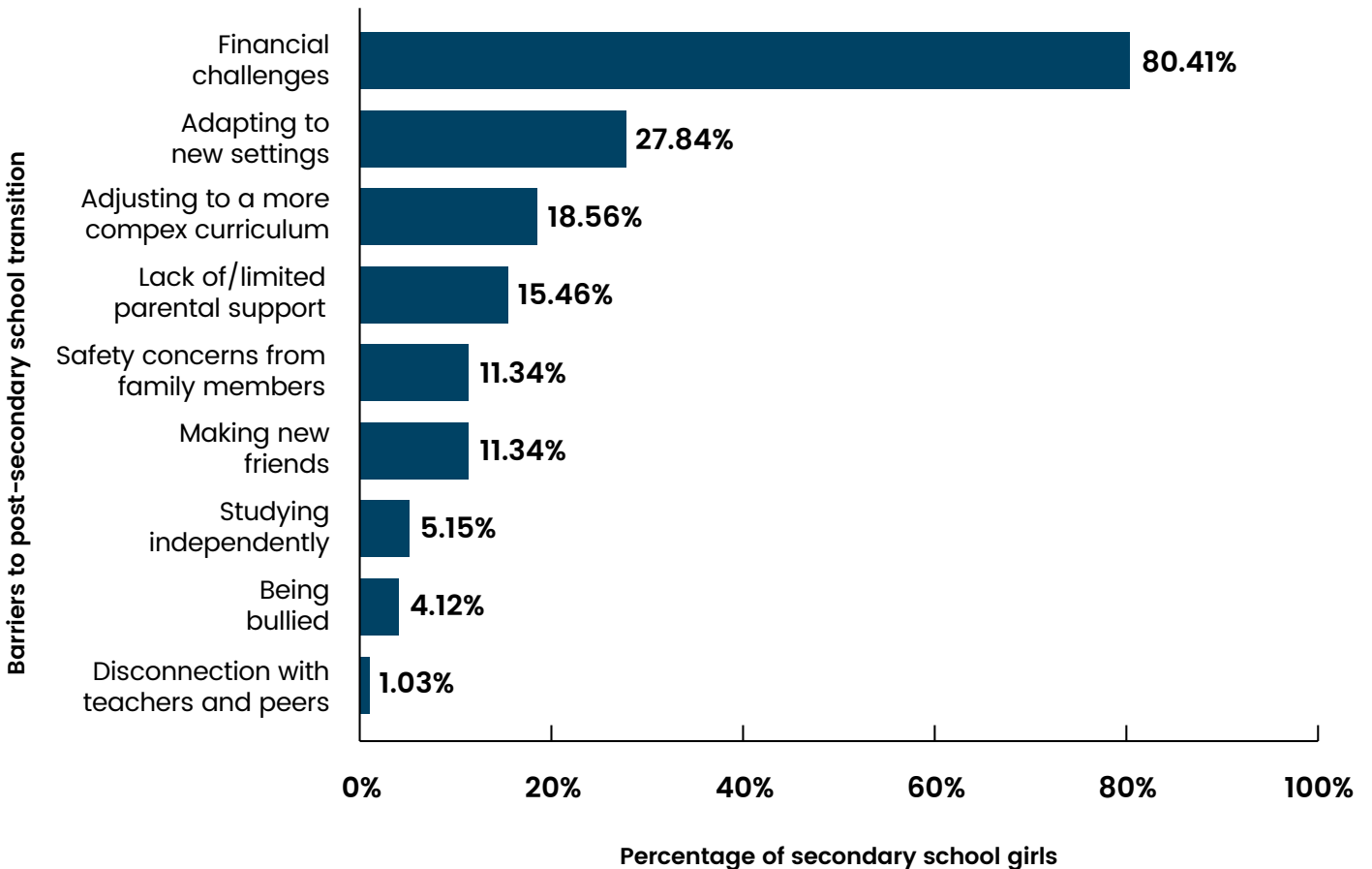
Figure 11: People with whom girls have discussed their post-secondary career options, N=97



Barriers to post-secondary education transition

Consistent with the primary school survey results, financial constraint (80.41%) was, by far, the most pronounced barrier to transition from secondary level to higher education. The girls surveyed also reported that they faced challenges in adapting to new settings (27.84%), adjusting to a more complex curriculum (18.56%), and limited parental support (15.46%).

Figure 12: Barriers to transition from secondary school to higher education, N=97



Secondary school girls whose caregivers were employed in the informal sector were nearly four times (47.42%) as likely to say they experienced financial barriers in their transition to higher education compared with their counterparts with parents working in the formal sector (12.37%). This underscores the need for financial support, such as bursaries and scholarships, to support vulnerable girls' transition to higher education.

Figure 13: Probability of experiencing financial barriers by caregivers' employment type (secondary), N=97



School support towards transition

This section presents findings on the activities that the surveyed schools were implementing to support girls' transitions from primary to secondary education, and from secondary to higher education and work. It draws on data collected from the girls through the surveys and focus groups, as well as interviews with various stakeholders, including headteachers, teachers, parents, and education system leaders.

a. School support for transition from primary to secondary education

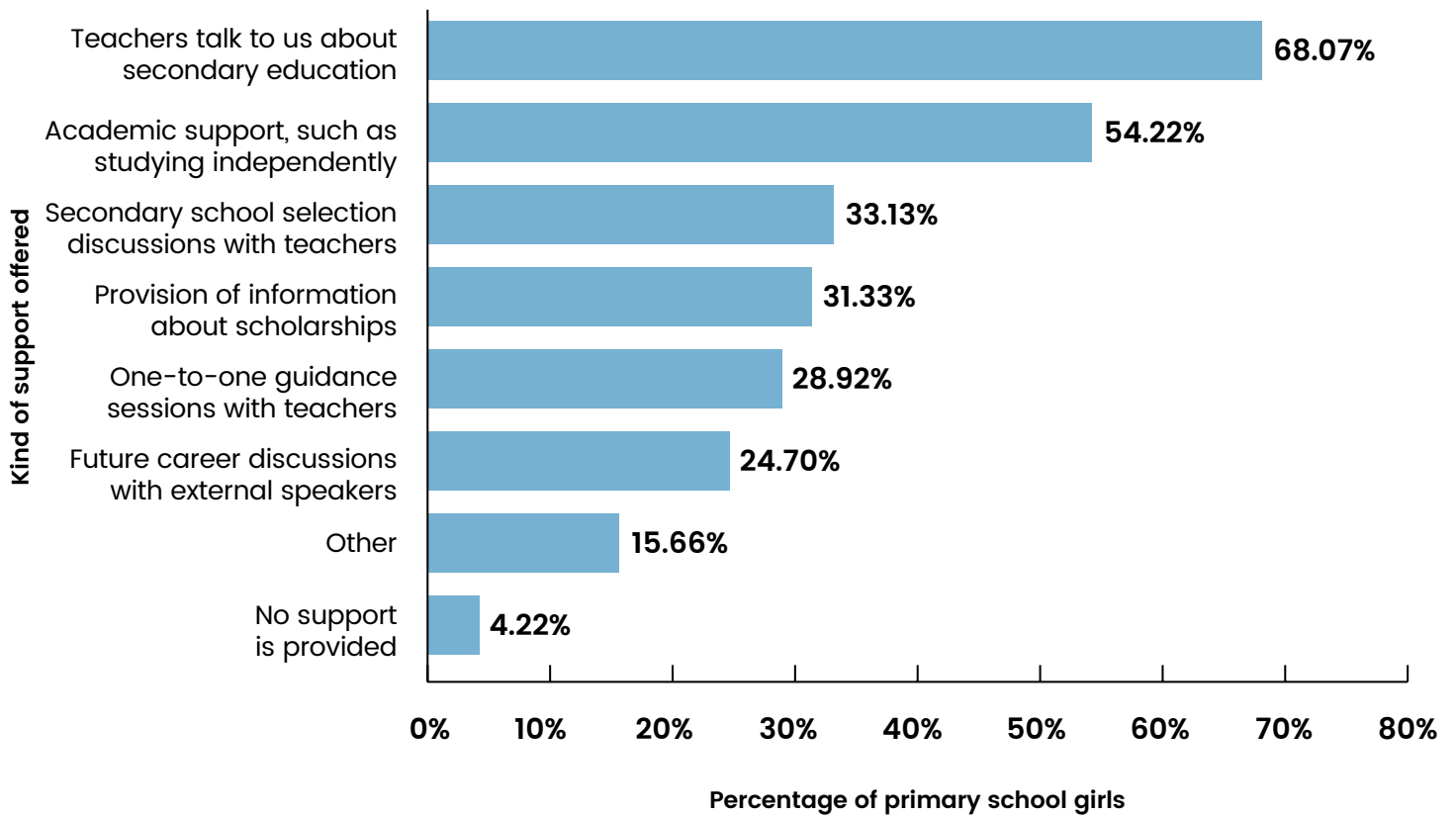
Results from the primary school survey show that girls were being supported through dedicated sessions where teachers talked about secondary education (68.07%), academic mentorship in areas such as independent studying (54.22%), secondary school selection discussions with teachers (33.33%), and provision of information about scholarship and bursary opportunities (31.33%). Only 4.22% of the primary school girls surveyed reported that they were not receiving any form of support (Figure 14).

Qualitative findings show that schools are offering career guidance, with a dedicated teacher leading the sessions. However, sessions are ad hoc. Where sessions are provided, they cover information about areas of employment and study that are less frequently chosen by girls (such as STEM subjects and related careers). On the other hand, sexual and reproductive health issues are covered during general guidance and counselling sessions with teachers.

“Sometimes they guide us on the career path that we should take to help us get employed faster. Those that have [a] quicker absorption rate.” – **Primary school pupil, female, Narok County**

“We have a female teacher who always talks to us and guides us on relationships with boys [SRHR, or sexual and reproductive health and rights] and the dangers of pregnancies if we get into relationships. She teaches us to avoid sexual relationships because they can make us drop from school.” – **Primary school pupil, female, West Pokot County**

Figure 14: School support for transition from primary to secondary school, N=166

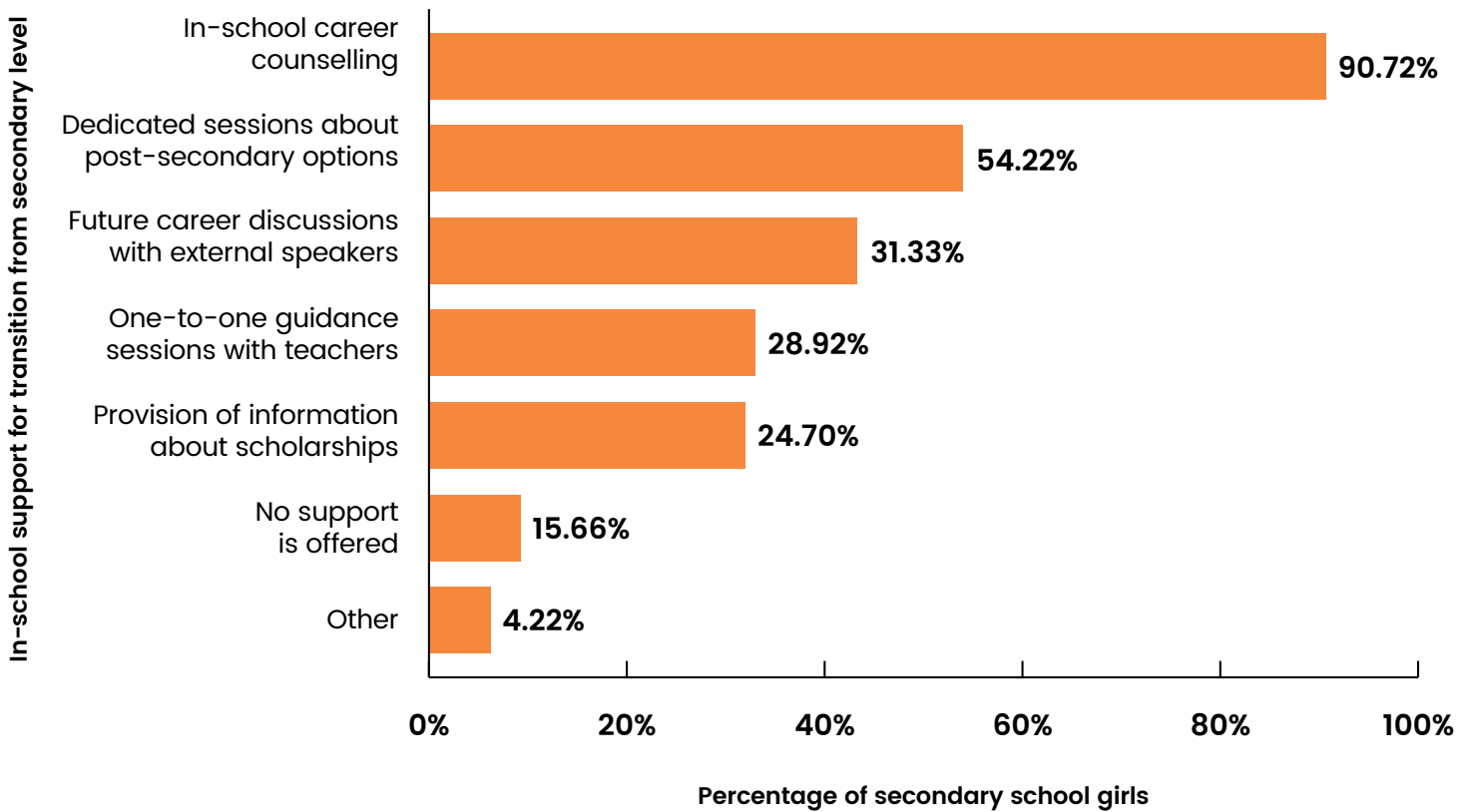


Interviews revealed that some of the headteachers had made considerable efforts to support girls staying in school, making their transition to the next level of education or employment possible. The most pronounced strategy was using schools as rescue centres for hosting girls at risk of forced marriages. In situations where girls were at a high risk of harm from their parents for resisting a forced marriage, female teachers reportedly hosted the girls during long school holidays on request from the headteachers.

b. School support for transition from secondary to higher education and onwards into work

Survey results show that some of the secondary schools were running various interventions to support girls' transitions to higher education. The most pronounced types of support included in-school career counselling (90.72%), career guidance teachers and school counsellors dedicating time to talk about post-secondary school options (54%), external speakers visiting schools to talk about future options (43.30%), and one-to-one sessions with teachers or other school staff about career plans (32.99%). Only 9.28% of the girls reported not receiving any form of support (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Secondary school support towards transition to higher education, N=97



The frequency of career counselling sessions varies from school to school, with some providing sessions weekly or monthly, and others offering them on a termly basis. The sessions are organised by the teachers in charge of the guidance and counselling department and typically focus on a range of issues, including selecting courses and careers based on academic performance and one’s interests.

“We have a career talk – it happens during the second term of every year – we invite students from Maasai Mara University. We also invite career experts to come over and speak with the learners about career choices.” – *Secondary school teacher, male, West Pokot County*

“We have a career talk. This term we had a career talk for the form 2s and advised them on subject selection. For the form 4s, we are planning one as they will be selecting their courses soon.” – *Secondary school teacher, male, Narok County*

“We have an active career department – there is a career day per term. In addition, we occasionally remind the learners to study the career wheel. Those who need career-related counselling do consult their respective teachers.” – *Secondary school teacher, male, Homa Bay County*

Figure 16: Career wheel displayed outside one of the secondary schools



c. School support for pregnant girls and young mothers

Kenya first introduced the school re-entry policy in 1984 to facilitate school re-admission of teen mothers who drop out due to pregnancy. The policy was revised in 2020 with an expanded focus, including learners who drop out of school for various reasons, such as early pregnancies, drug and substance abuse, gender-based violence, cultural practices, and those with unmet special needs and disabilities.⁶² While the guidelines provide a framework for re-admission of schoolgirls who get pregnant, structural barriers – such as stigma and balancing education with childcare responsibilities – have meant that completion and transition is still a challenge.⁶³

Qualitative findings show that some of the schools in this research are implementing interventions to support completion and transition for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers (Figure 17).

Figure 17: In-school support for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers

Flexible breaks during school time to allow girls to breastfeed their children

“When information is brought to us that a girl is pregnant, we ensure there is flexibility to meet their needs. During breaks, we allow them to go home to breastfeed. We allow those girls that have babies to breastfeed at school. We ask their caregivers to bring the babies over lunch hour for breastfeeding.” – **headteacher, male, Homa Bay county**

Time off to enable girls to take their children to clinics

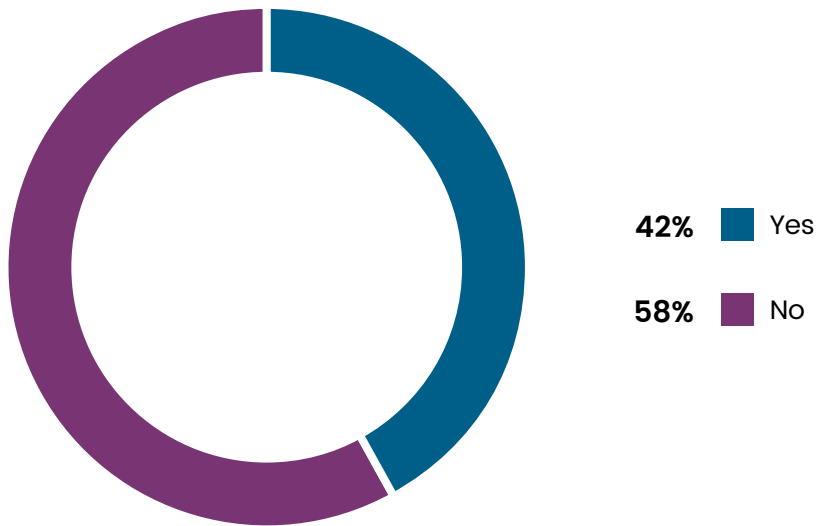
“In our efforts to make schools conducive for girls who are mothers, we allow them to be absent when they need to take their babies to clinics. This is done to make them feel that the school is a haven for both learning and childcare support.” – **headteacher, male, West Pokot county**

⁶² Republic of Kenya (2020a)
⁶³ Onyango et al. (2015)

d. In-school support for transition to work

Secondary education should be an important pathway for preparing young people for entry into the world of work by supporting the development of skills that help them to become adaptable and resilient, and enable them to be creative problem solvers.⁶⁴ However, this is not often the case, and many young people complete school ill-prepared to succeed in a dynamic and globalised labour market.⁶⁵ Overall, less than half (42%) of the secondary schools surveyed were providing mentorship on employment and job searching. Given that secondary education is the last level of schooling for the vast majority of Africa's youth,⁶⁶ these findings suggest that there is much to be done to ensure that secondary education fulfils its mandates to prepare youth for transition to work, as well as for tertiary education.

Figure 18: Do you talk about finding employment/jobs while in school? N=97



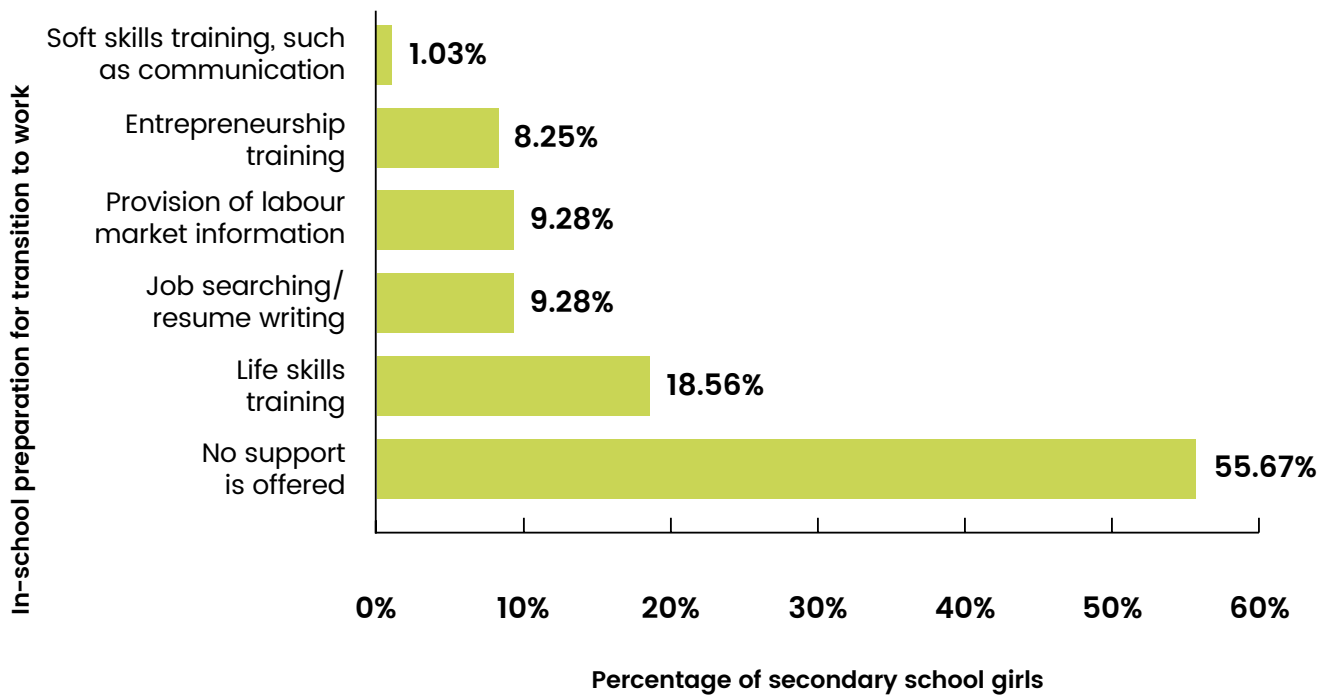
This research explored the kinds of activities that the secondary schools were providing to prepare learners to enter the workforce after completing their secondary education. Overall, only a small proportion of schools were running activities to prepare learners for the transition to work, with the main topics covered being life skill training (18.56%), job searching and resume writing (9.28%), provision of labour market information such as employment opportunities (9.28%), and entrepreneurship training (8.25%). Only 1.03% of the girls reported being trained in soft skills such as communication, despite this being an important skill for work, learning, and personal empowerment (Figure 19).

⁶⁴ Mastercard Foundation (2020)

⁶⁵ Bharara (2020)

⁶⁶ Mastercard Foundation (2020)

Figure 19: School support for transition to work, N=97



Experiences of young women working in male-dominated employment sectors

As part of the wider objective of generating evidence regarding what works in supporting disadvantaged girls' transition to decent livelihoods, this study collated evidence regarding the experiences of young women working in male-dominated fields. The focus on male-dominated fields was informed by existing literature showing that supporting girls' entry to livelihoods in which they are underrepresented, such as the technology, fire service, security, and construction sectors, can enhance their chances of securing employment.⁶⁷ Six young women working in different sectors were interviewed across the three counties (Table 4).

Table 4: Profile of young women interviewed

County	Number interviewed	Sectors employed in
West Pokot	2	P1: Transport sector – truck driver with the Kenya Power company.
		P2: Building and construction sector – plant operator employed by the county government of West Pokot
Homa Bay	2	P3: Construction sector – plumber.
		P4: Construction sector – water technician
Narok	2	P5: Motor vehicle service sector – carwash entrepreneur
		P6: Motor vehicle industry – mechanic

⁶⁷ Ameyia et al. (2022)

Interviews with the young women working in male-dominated employment sectors explored their experiences and perspectives across three areas, namely:

- » motivation for joining male-dominated employment sectors
- » work-related challenges encountered
- » changes needed to attract and retain more women in the male-dominated employment sectors.

Motivation to join male-dominated employment sectors

Interview findings revealed that, despite strong stereotypes that shape gender segregation in the labour market, several factors motivated these young women to move into, and stay in, male-dominated employment sectors. Firstly, all the young women interviewed explained that they were driven by support and mentorship from family members and friends. The mentors, particularly those in technology-related sectors, challenged the young women to join the sectors, which they described as adventurous, and provided practical opportunities for learning new skills while responding to complex challenges. Secondly, despite the sectors being male dominated, the young women interviewed all had a personal conviction that working in these sectors was fulfilling and provided promising opportunities for career progression compared with other fields. The findings from this study reveal four typically recurring personal attributes that motivated the young women to join and stay in male-dominated employment sectors:

- » self-efficacy and belief in one's own ability to effectively function in a complex and competitive male-dominated employment sector
- » sense of purpose and self-esteem to stay focused in a competitive and male-dominated environment
- » unwavering drive to disturb the status quo, succeed, and be a role model to other young women.

Challenges of working in male-dominated employment sectors

While the young women interviewed had a positive outlook on future career prospects for women in male-dominated professions, they reported experiencing several barriers. The major challenge reported was discrimination and bias driven by gender stereotypes and attributed to the minority status of women in male-dominated professions. In Narok County, for example, one of the young women interviewed narrated how male clients were reluctant to have her repair their cars and preferred male mechanics. Interestingly, the male mechanics could sometimes reach out to their female counterparts for assistance, as one interviewee reported.

“There are times when male clients doubted my capability as [a] lady and became reluctant to have me repair their cars. In such cases, I referred them to another male mechanic, who would sometimes consult me for assistance. When such male clients see you being consulted by another male mechanic, it is when they take you seriously.” – **Young woman, mechanic, Narok County**

Some of the male-dominated sectors, such as road construction, often involve travelling further afield to locations that lack basic amenities, including housing and water supply. Some of the young women interviewed reported that this presents them with challenges as they cannot share unpartitioned company buildings with their male counterparts. Consequently, they are often compelled to rent rooms in nearby towns, which is an additional cost burden often not covered by their employers.

“Sometimes you find that in places we go doing road construction, there is no water – this makes life quite challenging. Previously, I also worked with contractors who could not even provide basic things like shelter while in the field. This forced me to dig into my savings to sleep in lodges. In places where there are rental houses, I travel with my beddings and rent a room there.” – **Young woman, plant operator, West Pokot County**

Other challenges experienced by young women working in male-dominated fields include:

- » balancing domestic roles and work responsibilities, especially when travelling further afield
- » sexual harassment by senior colleagues
- » hostility and negative attitudes from male colleagues who view women as encroachers into their field.

Despite the challenges, the young women interviewed were determined to carry on, and they were all optimistic that conditions would improve with time. Some of the recommendations for improving the welfare of women in male-dominated fields included:

- » establishing strong pro-women trade unions to address welfare issues in male-dominated fields
- » more proactive sensitisation to change work-related gender stereotypes
- » enacting strong laws to commit employers to providing separate basic amenities for women, such as housing and water, when working in places far from their homes
- » encouraging companies to implement affirmative actions and have more women in leadership positions to ensure sensitivity to gender-specific challenges.

Conclusions

This phase of the study explored the expectations and experiences of girls regarding the transitions from primary to secondary school and onwards to higher education and work.

Results from the survey show that nearly all the girls surveyed would like to transition from primary to secondary school and onwards to higher education and work. For primary school girls, the major drivers of motivation to transition were (1) the desire to move to a new school, (2) to learn new subjects, and (3) to interact with learners from other schools. These findings suggest a low level of ambition to transition for reasons of further study, and therefore underscore the need for sensitisation to enable primary age girls, caregivers, and communities to understand the wider advantages of continuing with education and the value it can bring later in life.

An overwhelming majority of both the primary and secondary school girls reported that they were prepared for transition. However, results from the primary school survey suggest that when compared with other dimensions, fewer learners were confident in their preparedness for setting goals for their studies and exercising responsibility over schoolwork. This might be explained by limited opportunities to exercise autonomy over academic work at primary school level, where teaching and learning is largely directed by teachers. There is a need to provide self-directed learning activities to help children develop autonomy and more control in their studies to facilitate a smooth transition to secondary school level.

Survey results show that caregivers constitute the main support system often consulted for information and support regarding the transitions from primary to secondary school and onwards to higher education and work. However, siblings and friends are also consulted by a small proportion of learners. The proportion of learners who consult their teachers for information is even lower. While schools may be viewed as primary duty bearers in all aspects of education, these findings demonstrate the overwhelming need for caregiver involvement in preparing children for transition. Equally important is the need for further research to explore why only a very small proportion of learners consult their teachers for information and support regarding transition.

While secondary education is an important platform for preparing young people for entry into the world of work, less than half (42%) of the secondary schools were providing mentorship on employment and job searching. Specific activities focusing on preparation for the transition to work ranged from life skill training to job searching and resume writing, and also included provision of labour market information and entrepreneurship training. None of the schools were offering ICT (information and communications technology) training. This underscores the need for career education programmes which integrate digital literacy and transferable skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, resilience, and teamwork, which are in increasing demand in both the formal and informal sectors, as well as in lifelong learning.

We also found that socio-economic background has major implications for children's successful transitions across the education system and into work. For example, girls with caregivers working in the informal sector were four times (48.19%) more likely to report financial barriers compared with those whose caregivers were working in the formal sector (11.45%). In addition, teenage pregnancies present additional barriers to school completion and transition to the next level.

Preliminary recommendations for policymakers

This is the second report in a three-year programme of research into girls' transitions. The final report will be available in 2024 and will contain a follow-up phase of research with the same participants to validate the findings. This said, it is still possible to make preliminary recommendations for policymakers. **To help girls at risk of not transitioning to secondary education, this research suggests:**

- » provision of scholarships that cover school levies and indirect costs such as instructional materials
- » sensitisation of parents to ensure they offer the support needed for effective transition
- » remedial lessons to help struggling learners improve their performance and develop a positive attitude towards school transition
- » provision of comprehensive career education, which should include activities that prepare learners for adjusting to a more complex curriculum and new settings as they transition across the education system and into work.



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