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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GIRLS' SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM AND DROPOUT IN THE SOUTHERN NATIONS, NATIONALITIES AND PEOPLES' REGION (SNNPR), ETHIOPIA

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the factors contributing to girls' school absenteeism and dropout in different zones and special woredas of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR), Ethiopia. To achieve this purpose, descriptive survey research design with mixed method was employed. The sample zones and respondents were elected using multistage sampling techniques. The primary sources of data were principals, teachers, students and parents. They were selected by using purposive, simple random sampling, stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques respectively. The data gathering tools were questionnaires, focus group discussion, interview and document analysis. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study showed that, among other factors, household workload contributed most significantly ($p=0.000$) to girls' absenteeism in schools. This shows that there is a significant difference between opinion of respondents. For instance, more than 23% (529) were found in Wolaita Zone. The second most important factor was shortage of food at home. Due to this factor, more than 28% (855) girls' were absent from all the schools included in this study. And, more than 25% of these girls were absent from the schools in Kembata and Hadiya zones. The author also found out that the number of girls repeating grades was relatively higher in the Semen Omo 12% (129) and Hadiya 8% (90) zones. Furthermore, the findings from the household survey revealed that the major causes of school dropout were financial constraints, marriage and long distance to school. It was observed that 2207 students dropped out only due to financial constraints. Among the zones, relatively higher dropouts were recorded in the Wolaita 19% (579), Gurage 17% (505), and Hadiya 17% (498) zones. On the contrary, it was only in the Wolaita zone that girls did not terminate their education because of marriage. The finding reveals that there is a significant correlation between absenteeism and students dropout ($p=0.000$). Finally, to improve the existing problems, feasible recommendations were made by showing directions to different stakeholders on how to solve the identified challenges.

Key Words: Girls, absenteeism, dropout, repetition

1.   INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant role in societal and economic development of any country. Lack of participation of citizens in education affects the development of a country in every aspect. According to the World Conference on Education (2001), all children, particularly girls, must have access to and complete quality education by the year 2015. This ascertains that every citizen has the right to get equal access to basic education irrespective of one's race, gender, ethnic group and other factors. However, in developing countries, there are different factors that aggravate students' absenteeism, dropout and grade repetition.

Previous research findings (Holmes, 2003) have shown that the dropout rate of girls is higher than boys. For instance, Holmes (2003) argued that the educational attainment of girls is less than boys; and, girls have a tendency to drop out earlier than boys. Hence, higher dropout rate of girls implies that different factors could contribute to their dropout and hinder girls' school attendance. In general, there are factors that highly contribute to girls' dropout than that of boys. As Holcamp (2009) cited in Shahidul S. M. and Zehadul Karim A. H. M. (2015) stated that socio-cultural factors highly contribute to girls' dropout than boys'. Dropout has been and still is a serious problem in developing countries. The problem is actually worse in 'the sub-Saharan African countries in general, and in Ethiopia, in particular. As it was indicated in MoE and UNSEF report (2012), large number of students discontinued their education because of their engagement in productive and housekeeping activities. Moreover, it was affirmed by Mearegu and Tadesse (2015) that "the trends of dropout of primary school children of Ethiopia have shown increment". As reported in educational statistics annual abstract (2011), the dropout rate in primary schools (grades 1-8) in Ethiopia varies from year to year. In the years 2006 - 2010 G.C., the first two years data showed that the dropout rate of boys increased by a small proportion (0.5%); nevertheless, the dropout rate of girls decreased by the same proportion (0.5%). In 2008, the dropout rate of both sexes was 2.2%;while it was 2.3% for boys and 5.8% of girls. However, in 2010, the dropout rate of both sexes became higher (increased) to 5.5%. Thus, the data for 2010 showed that considerable number of students discontinued their education in different parts of the country for various reasons.

According to the data annually published by the SNNPR Education Bureau (SNNPR-EB, 2008; 2009; 2010; 2012a; 2012b), there was mostly an increase in dropout rate in the region from year to year. As shown in Fig. 1, the average school dropout rates at primary education level showed inconsistency as of like the national dropout rate (MoE 2011). For example, in the years 2008 – 2012 G.C, the dropout rates at primary education level (grade 1 - 8) mostly increased from year to year (Fig.1). The average dropout rate increased from 12% in 2008 to 17.1% in 2009 showing a 5.1% increment. Similarly, the average dropout rate increased from 17.1% in 2009 to 20.4% in 2010 showing a 3.3% increment. However, it decreased by 6.6% from the year 2010 to 2011. And thereafter, the average dropout rate showed again an increase of 4.2% from the year 2011 to 2012.
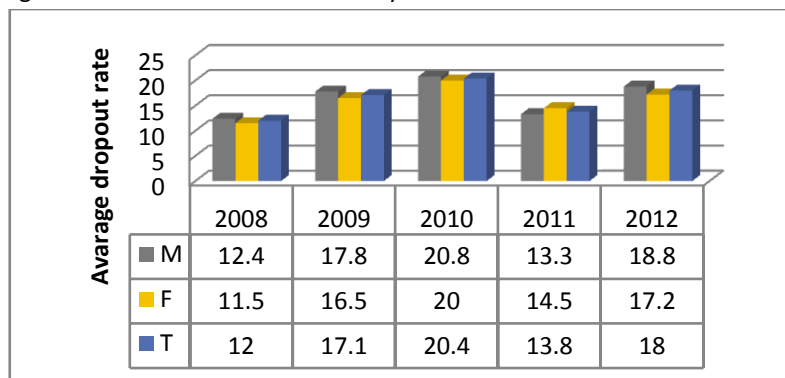

Avarage dropout rate	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
■ M	12.4	17.8	20.8	13.3	18.8
■ F	11.5	16.5	20	14.5	17.2
■ T	12	17.1	20.4	13.8	18

Figure 1. Patterns of dropout rate in primary school in SNNPR (Source*: Adapted from EB-SNNPR(2012b)*

The SNNPR education bureau is striving to minimize dropout rate of students from year to year, for instance, by mobilizing different stakeholders. This include principals, vice principals, teachers, and parent teacher association (PTA).These different groups are given the assignment of returning dropouts back to school. However, significant change was not observed as it was expected. This is simply because the root cause of students' dropout from schools has not yet been addressed satisfactorily. Some of the major causes of school dropout are known to be economic problem, social factors and health related problems (MoE and UNSEF 2012). Thus, the major objectives of this research was to assess the magnitude of the dropout rate and to identify the factors that contributed to girls' dropout in primary schools in the SNNPR.

2.   Research Questions

This research was intended to investigate the dropout rate of students. The students are considered as dropouts when they stop coming to school after they are enrolled and, of course, before completing a specific academic year. To assess the extent of dropout rate and to identify the existing challenges, the following basic research questions have been formulated.

1. What is the magnitude and trends of dropout rate in the primary schools of SNNPR?
2. What are the major causes to girls' dropout of schools in SNNPR?
3. What are the possible measures to be taken to reduce dropout rates in the primary schools?

3.   Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to achieve the following specific objectives

- To investigate the magnitude and trends of the problem.
- To pinpoint those factors that drive students to quit schooling and
- To identify measures taken to retain students' dropout in the primary schools of the study area.

4.   Research methodology

This study employed descriptive survey with both qualitative and quantitative method. Questionnaire was distributed to 12080 households, while the interview was administered to *Kebele* board members, and focus group discussion was held with different stakeholders closely working with Bureau of Women Children and Youth Affairs in SNNPR.

5.   Conceptual framework of the study

Students' dropout from school over a given time reflects the impact of different factors such as economic, social and health factors associated with students' family in particular or with the community at large. Economic problem factor can broadly be categorized into shortage of food, lack of learning materials and engagement in income generating work. Social and health problem factors directly influence students to dropout from school. Social problems can be categorized in to early marriage, parental death and abduction. The above mentioned factors also indirectly influence the dropout of students by negatively affecting their educational achievements in school. They are the causes for absenteeism, decreased learning interest and poor academic performance, and thus influencing dropout rate of students.

The conceptual framework shows some of the existing factors that influence student's dropout from school. Some of the factors are interrelated and influence one another. Some of them influence students directly, and, some others indirectly influence dropout through their impact on school performance. The conceptual framework is shown in Fig. 2.
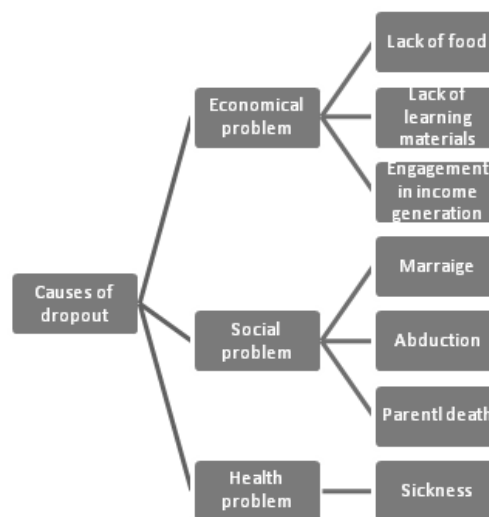

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

6.   Sources of data

The main data for this study were generated from both primary and secondary sources. The bulk of the data from the issue in the study were generated through household survey questionnaire, the secondary data were used to supplement the household survey. Primary data source was household survey in sample area of different zones in the region using multistage sampling techniques. From each zone (18 zones and 2 special woredas) in the region, by using Cochran (1977) sample size determination, 604 households were selected and totally 12,080 households were selected for the study but about11,162 questionnaires were returned.

7.   Major findings of the study

The major findings of this study are presented in here under the following subheadings.

7.1.   Factors contributing to dropout

a.   Absenteeism

Absenteeism is one of the leading factors for students to dropout from school. Research has shown that absenteeism leads to students to poor academic achievement, and subsequently to early dropout. Lamb S. et al. (2011) stated that absenteeism is one the factors that predict students' dropout. Students who regularly are absent from school are more likely to be at risk of dropout.
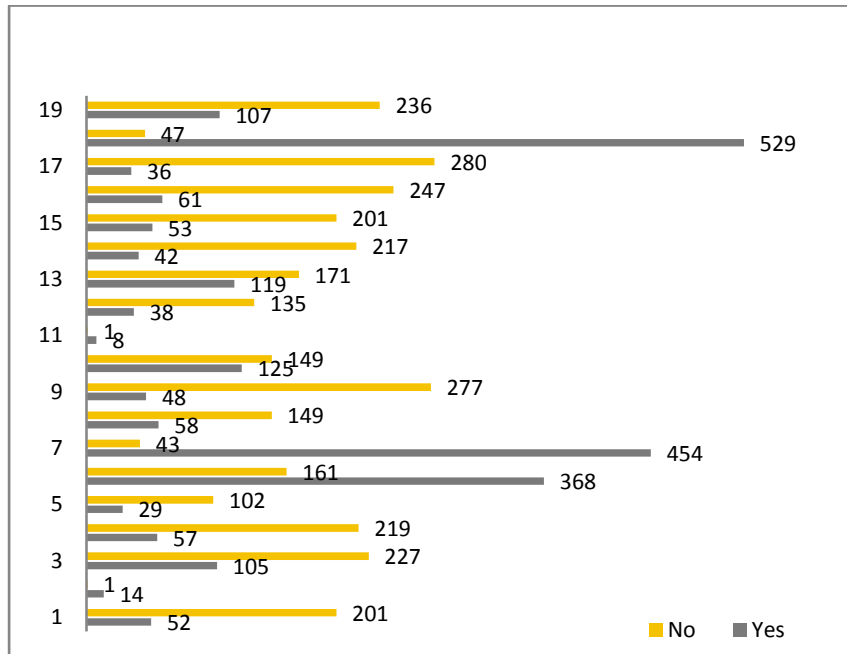

Figure 3. Girls' school absenteeism in the SNNPR

As shown in Fig. 3, the absenteeism of students varies from zone to zone. For example, the relatively high absenteeism was observed in Wolaita 23% (529), next to that the second highest number was recorded in Hadiya 20% (454), and the third highest number of absents was registered in Gurage 16% (368) zones. Compared to these zones, generally in others low students' absenteeism was observed in two weeks' time, such as in the Kambata (8), Benchmaji (14) and Gedeo (29) zones. This shows that there are some factors for girls that cause them to be absent from school than boys. For example, shortage of food, household work, lack of educational materials and school distance. Jennings Mary (2011) has explicitly identified one of the major factors that contribute to late arrival at school, absenteeism and dropout from school at all levels, and dropout amongst girls was household work. The table below presents the household respondents' responses on the main reasons of girls' absenteeism from school.

Table 1. Reasons for girls' absenteeism from school in SNNPR

Name of zones and special woreda		Main reasons for girls' school absenteeism					Total
		household work load	food shortage at home	lack of education materials	sickness	others	
Zones	Baseketo	13	10	0	23	5	51
	Bench Maji	125	204	0	2	0	331
	Dawro	53	4	2	32	7	98
	Gamo_Gofa	15	5	2	16	40	78
	Gedeo	3	0	0	25	1	29
	Guraghe	386	114	0	4	1	505
	Hadiya	285	211	0	0	0	496
	Halaba	16	4	1	15	3	39
	Hawassa	14	2	6	19	3	44

	Kaffa	78	2	2	30	5	117
	Kanbata	33	213	0	0	0	246
	Sheka	18	4	6	33	30	91
	Sidama	18	3	4	39	3	67
	Silte	1	0	0	9	3	13
	Wolayita	492	53	0	0	0	545
S. woreda	Konta_S_Woreda	14	2	3	11	8	38
	S_Omo	20	3	5	52	37	117
	Segene	3	1	2	17	11	34
	Yem	61	20	0	26	9	116
	Total	1648	855	33	353	166	3055

As it can be seen from table 1, among the main reasons for girls' absenteeism, household workload took the highest line share in most zones. Quite a large number of students were absent from school because of household workload especially in the Wolaita 30% (492), Guraghe 23% (386), and Hadiya 17% (285) zones. This data reveals that quite a large number of girls in SNNPR (1648) did not attend school because of high household workload. Moreover, according to the study participants' response, shortage of food supplies had impact on girls' absenteeism. Shortage of food contributed significantly to girls' absenteeism from school especially in the Kanbata 25% (213), Hadiya 25% (211) and Bench Maji 24% (204) zones. However, as shown in table1, none of the girls were absent due to shortage of food in the Gedeo and Silte zones. This indicates that in some zones poverty affects school attendance of girls. According to Jennings M. (2011), it was confirmed that, in SNNPR, use of child for household work is the major cause of dropout. He identified that "child labour is extensively practiced throughout SNNPR. Highland girls fetch wood and water, do marketing and carryout household chores". This directly coincides with the identified result in this study.
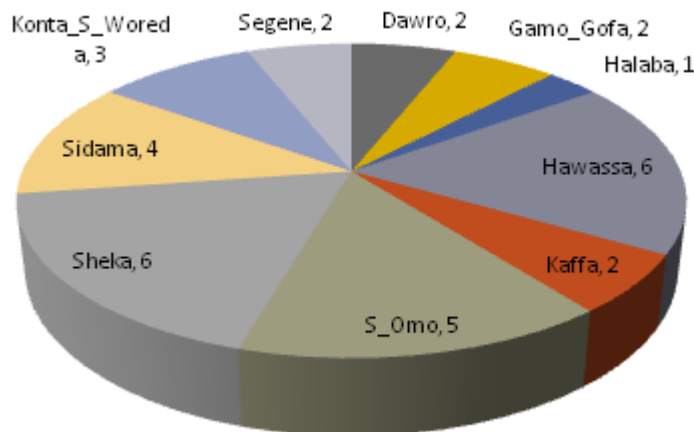

Figure 4. Students absenteeism due to lack of educational material.

As shown in Fig. 4, a total of only 33 students were absent from school due to lack of educational materials. Among these, the highest absenteeism was observed in Sheka and Hawassa (18%) in each and the least was at Segen special woreda (only one student). In seven Zones (Baseketo, Bench Maji, Gedeo, Hadiya, Kanbata, Silte and Wolayita) and 1 Special Woreda (Yem), there was no any student reported as absent from school due to shortage of educational materials. This implies that there is an adequate supply of educational materials for girls as well as for boys. It is, of course, clear that the availability of educational material enhances the participation of students in their education, thereby stimulating more interest in their academic performance.

As shown in Fig. 5, a total of 353 students were absent from school in the surveyed zones and special woreda because of sickness. The order of zones in SNNPR that were highly influenced by absenteeism because of student sickness was SouthOmo (52), Sidama (39) and Sheka (33). In the Hadiya, Kanbata and Wolayita zones, no students were reported to be absent due to sickness. The results therefore showed that sickness was a problem for girls' failure to attend classes in some zones. However, in some other zones, either no students were sick or sickness

did not affect the attendance of girls in school. Generally, due to various reasons, relatively high absenteeism was recorded in the Wolaita (545), Guraghe (504) and Hadiya (496) zones. On the contrary, very few number of students were absent in the Silti (13) and Gedeo (29) zones, and Segen special woreda (34). Research (Ngales et al. 2015) has shown that that frequent absence of students from school leads towards termination of school in general and low school performance in particular.. Ngales (2005) cited in Shahidul S. M. and Zehadul Karim A. H. M. (2015) found that in Ethiopia, frequent absence of female students led them to drop out from school.
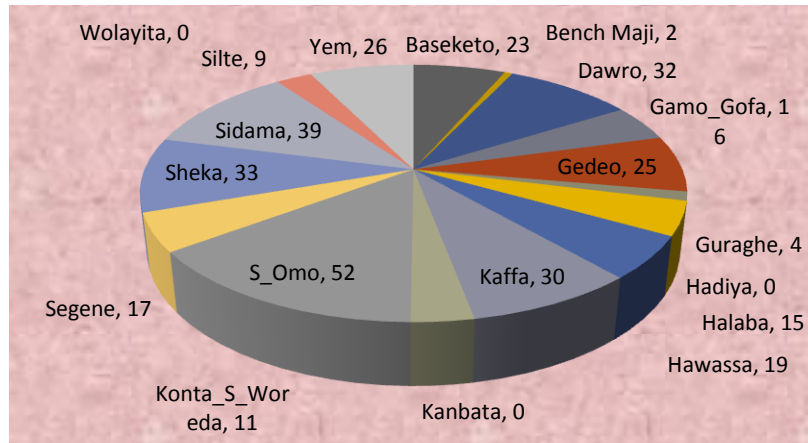

Figure 5. Students absenteeism as a result of sickness

Grade repetition among girls in SNNPR

Another factor which leads girls to dropout is grade repetition. Fig. 6 shows the proportion of girls who have repeated in the same grade at least for one year. The repetition rate of girls in the different zones of SNNPR is also different. Fig. 6 shows that high repetition rates of girls were observed in the Semen Omo (129), Hadiya (90), Hawassa (76) and Kaffa (76) zones. However, low repetition rate of girls was observed in the Bench Maji (1) and in Kanbata (3) zones. The causes of grade repetition for girls are missing classes and low academic performance. These would ultimately lead them towards termination of school. Thus, repetition of girls in a particular grade level increases the probability of termination of school.
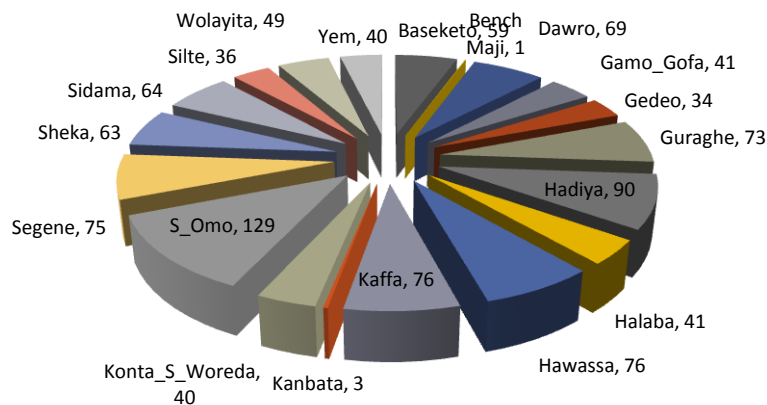

Figure 6: The proportion of girls repeating grades in SNNPR

8.   Major causes of dropout of girls in SNNPR

        One of the intentions of this study was to investigate major causes of dropout in various zones and special woredas of the SNNPR. Therefore, in the survey, an attempt was made to identify potential causes for girls' dropout from school in the zones and special woredas. Accordingly, the major causes of dropout identified based on the household survey respondents are economic, social and health related problems (see table 2). Thus, each of the causes for dropout discussed below.

Table 2. The number of girls who dropped out from school due to financial constraint, school distance, marriage, abduction and other potential causes in the SNNPR.

Name of zones and special woredas		Major causes for girl's dropout				
		economic reason	distance from home	marriage	abduction	others
Zones	Baseketo	12	0	10	2	9
	Bench Maji	323	33	39	0	1
	Dawro	18	5	10	0	14
	Gamo_Gofa	14	1	17	0	4
	Gedeo	8	1	20	0	7
	Guraghe	442	61	2	0	0
	Hadiya	415	82	1	0	0
	Halaba	28	8	33	3	14
	Hawassa	4	2	13	2	3
	Kaffa	10	3	15	0	17
	Kanbata	249	6	18	0	0
	Sheka	9	18	30	0	38
	Sidama	8	3	20	1	22
	Semenomo	13	1	22	2	16
	Silte	5	0	13	0	21
	Wolayita	571	8	0	0	0
S. Woredas	Konta_S_Woreda	6	2	8	2	10
	Segene	4	0	14	0	28
	Yem	68	8	2	0	27
	Total	2207	242	287	12	231

8.1. Economic problem

It was noted that the majority of students who dropped out from school were because of financial constraints. As it can be seen from table 2, majority of dropout students discontinued their education due to shortage of finance. The zones most affected by high dropout rate of girls due to financial constraint were the Wolaita 26% (571), Gurage 20% (442), Hadiya 19% (415), Bench Maji 15% (323) and Kanbata 11% (249) zones. In most developing countries, economic problem is the leading obstacle for children's education in general girls' in particular. Some studies shows that low family income may reduce the chance of schooling for girls (Mitiku Mulugeta 2014).

8.2. School distance

The second major cause for girls' dropout is school distance from home. As indicated in table 2, it has a great contribution for girls' termination of their education. For example, the numbers of students who discontinued their education due to school to home distance in Hadiya, Gurage and Benchi Maji zones were 34% (82), 25% (61) and 14% (33) respectively, disfavoring students school attendance. This shows that either the schools are constructed far away from students' home or the families of the students are living in a sparsely populated area. The data in table 2 shows that distance of school from home is not a reason for student's dropout in some zones and special woredas. For example, in Baseketo and Silte zones and Segen special woreda, none of them dropped out from school because of school distance. This shows that either schools' are built close to students' residences or people are densely populated. Lavy (1991) cited in Yokozeki Y. (1996) stated that the distance between home and school has a strong effect on the initial decision to attend school as well as for discontinuing education. Thus, in the surveyed zones and special woredas in SNNPR, most of them were not as such affected by school distance for termination of school. However, school distance affected school attendance of girls in some zones and one special woreda. This indicates that there is enormous progress in the region in school construction closer to students' residence.

8.3.   Marriage

The third major cause for dropout is marriage. Holcamp (2009) cited in Shahidul S. M. and Zehadul Karim A. H. M. (2015) stated that marriage is one of the causes for girls' dropout in rural areas. In the surveyed zones and special woredas the respondents said that some girls terminate their education because of early marriage. As shown in table 2, the numbers of girls who discontinued their education because of early marriage were 39 in Bench Maji, 33 (14%) in Halaba and 33 (11%)in Sheka zones 30 (10%). However, early marriage was not at all the reason for girls' dropout in the Wolaita zone. The zone has worked a remarkable job on awareness creation at each woreda through women affairs office.

8.4.   Abduction and others

A very small proportion of girls' terminated their education because of abduction. This clearly indicated that abduction was a minor reason for girls' dropout in five zones such as Halaba, Basketo, Hawassa, Semenomo and Sidama and in Konta special woreda. However, still in many zones and two woredas abduction was not a reason for girl's drop out in the region. Totally from all zone and special woredas only 12 students were dropout thier education because of abduction. In addition, other causes such as sickness, parental death, and girls' engagement in labor activities to earn money for their family had great impact on them to drop out. As shown in table 2, 38 (16%) girls from Sheka zone, 28 (12%) girls from Segen special woreda and 17 (7%) girls from Semen Omo zone discontinued their education because of either of the aforementioned additional factors. This shows that girls took responsibility to generate income for the their families and thus take care of them.

9.   Conclusion and Recommendation

This study revealed that, among other factors, household workload and shortage of food in a family were the two most important factors contributing to girls' absenteeism from school. For instance, a total of 81.9% (2503) girls were absent from school in the observed zones and special woredas within two weeks' time just because of workload and shortage of food in their families. Likewise, girls' dropout was also highly influenced by numerous challenges. Household workload and shortage of food as part of the economic problems, marriage as part of a social cause, and sickness as an element of health related factor played adverse roles contributing to high girls' dropout from school. The study revealed that a total of 2979 girls terminated their education because of the above mentioned causes. The large numbers of dropout of girls were registered in the Wolaita zone 19% (579) and the smallest number 1% (24) was reported for Hawassa city administration. In some other zones, a significant number of students also discontinued their education because of different factors. Even the dropouts of students were larger than students affected by absenteeism. To mention some of the zones with high dropout rates, in Guraghe 17% (505), in Hadiya 17% (498) and in Bench Maji 13% (398) dropouts were reported. It was very interesting to note that 92.9% (2207) dropped out their education because of only economic problems.

10.   Recommendations

The SNNPR regional government education bureau should work on minimizing absenteeism and dropout from school especially for girls. The major cause for absenteeism was household workload. Thus, the regional government should find ways of stopping the exploitation of child labor.

The families of dropout students should be supported to strengthen their economic power, and thereby fulfill the needs of their children. The fundamental cause for school dropout by the devastating majority was economic problem and shortage of food. It is important that the regional state considers either introducing economical support or creating job opportunity for the poor households to enable them minimize girls' dropout. The economical support may take the form of *Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT): a* scheme targeting parents who were unable to send their daughters to school due to serious financial constraints and shortage of food. There is a remarkable achievement in narrowing the distance of school from home in different areas of the country. However, the research result showed that there are still some places which need effort to solve the school distance problem. Thus the region has to exert efforts to build more schools close to where students live. Finally, the regional education bureau of SNNPR should organize experience sharing forums by recognizing the achievements registered by successful zones and special woredas in the region.

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