

**EMERGING TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN
KENYA: THE IMPACT OF INCREASED ENROLMENT**

BY

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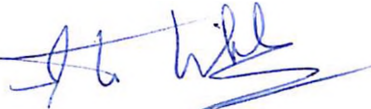
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This research project has been submitted for the award of a Master of Arts Degree in Gender and Development Studies with my approval as a university supervisor.

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DEDICATION

This project paper is dedicated to my son Cheikh Ahmad who has filled my life with joy and happiness.

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ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to examine the emerging trends in higher education among Muslim women and the impact of this increased enrolment. The study sought to show how cultural perceptions have changed towards the education of females. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the impact of increased enrolment into higher education on the Muslim women themselves and on their communities. The study also sought to find out if increased enrolment into institutions of higher education has positive benefits for the Muslim woman and her community.

The study was cross-sectional and exploratory. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and narratives. The findings are presented using narratives and verbatim quotes.

The study showed that there is a change in attitude and perception of Muslim parents towards the education of their daughters which in turn has had positive benefits for the families and the community generally. The study also indicates that there is enormous encouragement and support from families of these girls enrolling into university and this has contributed to their success in completing their studies and excelling in various fields.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Formal education is an institution in which development partners, governments, and educators have placed ultimate faith. It brings many benefits to society by promoting equality, contributing to economic development, raising consciousness to promote and consolidate the goals of a revolution, and by developing human potential to satisfy both individual and social goals (Robertson, 1984).

While the commitment to access education to the citizenry has been a consistent feature in the education vision of Kenya, the policies adopted in the 1980s were not in tandem with this vision. This was especially true given effects of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) introduced by the World Bank which resulted in many disadvantaged children especially girls from rural communities not accessing formal education due to prohibitive costs associated with schooling.(Bogonko, 1992)

One of the main goals of the Kenyan government is to provide educational opportunities to all school age children without discrimination based on gender, race, religion, socio-economic status or geographic location (GOK, 2007). International reports such as the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2003) reveals serious gender disparities in enrolment between regions in favour of males with regard to access, retention, completion, performance and transition.

Kenya's Ministry of Education has a gender policy which was launched in July 2007. The document outlines strategies to address gender disparities in the education sector (GOK, 2007). The policy aims at applying to all levels of education in Kenya and intends to address access, equity, retention, transition, relevance and quality of education. The government subscribes to the aspirations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This is a clear indication that the government has recognized that girls' and women's empowerment has been impeded by factors such as cultural and religious practices, inadequate policy guidelines, poverty and lack of awareness (GOK, 2007).

However, the participation of women in higher education in Kenya, like in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, is influenced by a complex inter-play between out of school and in-

school factors (FAWE/UNESCO, 2002). These factors influence and determine parents' and communities' commitment to invest and support girls' education.

Islam attaches equal opportunity to the education of boys and girls and so it does not impede Muslim girls from acquiring higher education. Nevertheless, within the Kenyan Muslim milieu, certain cultural underpinnings shape the interpretations of Islam on the role of women in society. Perceptions relating to sexual inequity, marriage, gender ideology, veiling and gender segregation all have a bearing on Muslim girls' access to higher education (Porter, 1990).

This study was carried out at the University of Nairobi, Kenya's oldest and premier university. It examined recent admission records of Muslim women into this university with the view to establishing emergent trends and the effects this has on the educated Muslim women and the communities they come from.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Muslim women have been denied access to higher education in the past due to many out-of-school factors such as sexual maturation, poverty, religious beliefs, girl-child labour, early marriages, parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards educating girls, socio-cultural practices and rites such as female genital cutting (FGC), insecurity, HIV/AIDS and lack of gender responsive legal and policy frameworks (FAWE, 2003). However, in recent years, there has been increased enrolment of young Muslim women in Kenyan universities. This has been due to increased awareness of the advantages of acquiring higher education and role models who have inspired the young women.

This study sought to establish the impact of this increased enrolment both on the women themselves and on their communities. How this educational empowerment translates itself into employment opportunities for the young women and how the Muslim community perceive this empowerment with regard to their social and economic expectations was the core of this study. It is with this background that the study endeavoured to establish whether acquiring higher education for the Muslim women has had positive or negative impact on the community. In particular the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of this increased enrolment into higher education on the Muslim women themselves and on their communities?

2. How has the community responded to the Muslim women acquiring higher education?

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 General objective

To explore the impact of increased enrolment of Muslim women into higher education and on their communities.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

1. To determine the impact of this increased enrolment on the Muslim women themselves.
2. To assess the impact of this higher education on the communities of these Muslim women.

1.4 Assumptions

1. Acquiring higher education by girls can influence the community's attitude towards girls' education.
2. Increased enrolment of young Muslim women into institutions of higher learning has positive benefits for the Muslim woman and her community

1.5 Study justification

The study has, no doubt, formed a basis for further research countrywide given its exploratory nature. The study should add value to academic pursuits related to Islam, gender and education, given the important role that religion plays in influencing young Muslim women's chances in education. The study findings will, hopefully, inform policy making and implementation with specific regard to enhancing higher education amongst Muslim women in sectors such as education and development. The study also hopes to contribute to the knowledge already established on the impact of higher education on women and society in general.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study examined the impact of increased enrolment of Muslim women into higher education on themselves and on their communities. The impact was also examined in terms of the social, cultural and economic outlook of the educated Muslim woman and her community. The sample population was drawn from the University of Nairobi only.

1.7 Study limitations

The study participants were drawn from a largely urban populace and the findings may not, therefore, necessarily reflect the views of the Muslim rural population whose daughters have joined higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review for this study was considered from two perspectives: general works on girls' education and specific studies that deal with Muslim girls' education. Research reveals that education has multifarious benefits and policy implications such as improving maternal childcare, nutrition and health, reducing infant mortality rates, increasing life expectancy and women's economic opportunities and productivity (UNICEF, 2004; World Bank 2006).

As several other studies are also highlighting (Afshar, 1989a, 1989b; Brah and Shaw, 1992; Brah, 1993; Basit, 1997; Ahmad, 2001; Ahmad et al, 2003), the presence of Muslim women in higher education and the diverse routes they follow in order to enter university contradicts problematic discourses that suggest that Muslim women's educational choices are limited due to cultural or religious reasons. In a similar vein, as Archer (2002) notes, the issue of Muslim young people's career choices is one that is located within the production and reproduction of gendered inequalities that are inextricably linked to gendered and Muslim identities.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Islam, Gender and Education

Within Muslim communities, culture and the teachings of Islam influence the perceptions of roles of men and women (Maina, 2003). For example, in a Muslim household, the delineation of roles implies that females operate within the domestic and private sphere while males operate within the public sphere. However, Islam attaches equal importance to both the private and public domains of activity, and there is nothing to suggest that more significance is attached to the roles that men perform in the public domain at the expense of women's roles in the private realm.

Basit's (1997) research on young Muslim women in schools and their career and personal aspirations discussed education as a vehicle for social mobility, but also noted how the stereotyped attitudes of many teachers and career advisors of Muslim women and schoolgirls influenced the nature of the advice they gave. In addition, due to the cultural lens of androcentrism (Bem 1993), some verses in the Quran are interpreted to mean the subjugation of women and despotism, thus bluntly disregarding Islam's teachings on the equality of the sexes. Islam has been seen as sanctioning patriarchal power which has, in turn, influenced the perception of women's roles. The confinement of female roles to the domestic sphere implies

that girls' education is neglected (Maina, 2003). The stereotypical depiction of women's roles affects girls' access to higher education in situations where parents think that advanced education is not required. Although Islamic injunctions grant women various rights, the internalization of cultural values and interpretations of Islamic teachings on the role of women impact negatively on girls' higher education. A high premium is placed on educating boys who are purportedly the ultimate heads and breadwinners for their families.

Education is an integral part of any society and, in an Islamic society, religion determines the education system. While there are studies touching on Muslim education in Kenya, for example, Bagha (1974, 1981), Strobel (1975), Mambo (1980), Salim (1973) and Wamahiu (1988), these studies do not give scholarly attention to the subject of higher education and no exhaustive study has been done on the impact of enrolment of Muslim females in higher education.

In Kenya, western education plays a big role in determining one's social placing and economic well-being and it has been argued that Muslims have been marginalized in education, a situation which could be explained partly by the colonial educational legacy (Maina, 2003). Research concerning gender in sub-Saharan Africa has consistently found females to be at a disadvantage. In the worst cases, females are overtly oppressed and largely excluded from education. However, in more recent research in specific places, women are drawing even with males. In Uganda, for example, studies on Muslim women have shown that the secondary school enrolment gender gap has at least diminished, and perhaps disappeared altogether (Wells, 2009; World Bank, 2005).

Many Muslim women do not have access to higher education as their counterparts in the general society in Kenya (Ruto et al., 2009). There are certain trends that have in the past influenced their higher education, both positively and negatively, including social, economic, cultural and religious barriers.

2.2.2 The Impact of Increased Enrolment

Blumberg (1984) and Inglehart (1997), cited in Evans and Kelley (2007), indicate that women's labour force participation in the world is a fascinating issue for both theoretical and policy reasons. Modernization theory has long predicted the convergence of gender roles, as rapid growth in industrial productivity and consequent strong wage gains have drawn first men, and then women, out of home and farm production and into work in offices and factories. Hakim (1998) explains that other evidence suggests that this convergence is more apparent than real: the tempo and intensity of labour force participation are, for most women, still largely governed by family considerations.

2.2.3 Impact of Education on Society

The importance of education towards the development of any nation is universally recognized. It develops the human potential and equips humankind with the skills needed for its survival. In Africa women are mainly recognized for their reproductive role. It is recognized also that their level of education influences potentially her economic productivity and earning power. Girls and women have made great gains in this area over the past few decades since governments have removed all formal barriers to equal access to the school system. Education is also a means of enhancing self-confidence among girls through increased interaction and competition with boys (Kakwenzire, 1987).

Some existing discourses of Muslim family structures situate them as inherently oppressive and as presenting barriers to women's participation in higher education and the labour market. These rely on discourses of 'degradation and despair' and tend to present racial and pathological accounts of ethnic minority families, especially 'arranged marriages' (for a detailed critique see Ahmad, 2006a). However, echoing some other studies (Afshar, 1989a, 1989b; Brah and Shaw, 1992; Brah, 1993; Basit, 1997; Ahmad, 2001, Ahmad et al, 2003), Muslim women cited their families as key sources of encouragement and motivation towards higher education and families as key sources of encouragement for studying and in thinking about future careers.

2.2.4 Emerging Trends in Higher Education

Many Muslim women do not have access to higher education as their counterparts in the general society in Kenya (FAWE, 2002). There are certain factors that have in the past influenced their higher education, both positive and negative, including social, economic, cultural and religious barriers. With increased globalization communities are expected to be able to face the challenges of mobilizing the resources available to eliminate barriers which women face in acquiring higher education and the Muslims are no exception to the rule as education is the key to success.

Nearly 50 per cent of women around the world are officially in the labour force and women constitute approximately one-third of all workers around the world (Tzannatos, 1999). One of the important factors that influence this situation is education. Today, most people believe that with higher education, they will enjoy better work conditions and a higher pay. Education is one important element in human capital formation. In Malaysia, for example, women are regarded as important contributors to the country's economic and social development (ADB, 1998). Their access to health and education and their participation in the economy have increased rapidly over the years. Economic growth has been accompanied by the greater participation of women in the formal workforce and in a range of other activities. The female labour force participation rate has kept pace with population growth and the number of female and male workers doubled between 1970 and 1995, while the labour force participation rate remained relatively unchanged after 1980 (FAWE/UNESCO, 1998).

2.3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the women's empowerment theory developed by Sara Longwe in the 1990s. It views the empowerment of women as central to the development process. The Women's Empowerment Framework recognizes that gender inequities do not merely arise from differences in gender roles, but from the gendered division of labour and the allocation of benefits and resources. The framework operates at five levels: the welfare, access, conscientization, mobilization and control levels of empowerment. By introducing five hierarchical levels of equality, the framework suggests that the higher one goes, the more empowered one becomes. It also stipulates that empowerment is an essential element of development, meaning that empowering women transcends down to the rest of the society (Longwe, 1995, Fenella, Sweetman, 2005).

2.3.1 Relevance of the Theory to the Study

Since education empowers individuals, in this particular study the empowerment theory was the most relevant. In line with the theory's advances, the empowerment of females among the Muslim community can be achieved by enabling them to access equal control over factors of production and participate equally in the development process. Empowerment is an essential element of development and so empowering women transcends down to the rest of the society, and this study sought to investigate how Muslim women's education is impacting on their community. Having more female Muslim students enrol and complete university education gives them an opportunity to take charge of their lives and escape from some of the factors that lead to their discrimination and oppression.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Site

The geographical area of the study was the University of Nairobi (Figure 3.1). The University of Nairobi is a corporate body established by an Act of Parliament (Cap 210 of the Laws of Kenya) and a pioneer institution of higher learning in Kenya. This University is situated in Nairobi which is the capital city of Kenya with a fast growing population of 3.5 million (UON, 2007). The university population is cosmopolitan and has a substantial number of Muslim students.

3.2 Research Design

This was a cross-sectional and exploratory study. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and narratives. In-depth interviews were held with female Muslim students at the University of Nairobi. Key informant interviews were held with Muslims involved in community work, Muslim Chaplains at the University of Nairobi, and Muslim scholars within the university. Content analysis of data was based on emerging themes from the study. The findings are presented using narratives and verbatim quotes.

3.3 Study Population

The population for this study consisted of Muslim female students currently enrolled at the University of Nairobi.

3.4 Sample Population and Sampling Procedure

The sample population consisted of fifteen Muslim female students currently enrolled at the University of Nairobi. These were recruited purposively. Twenty female students studying at the University of Nairobi were interviewed. The first group of 10 girls consisted of those girls studying in the faculty of medicine, Actuarial Sciences, Pharmacy and Microbiology. The second group of 5 study participants was drawn from the Schools of Business, Education, Engineering and Law.

3.5 Methods of data collection

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were held with Muslim female students and the researcher sought to find out whether they felt there has been increased enrolment of Muslim women students at the University of Nairobi, and what impact this had on their and their communities' socio-economic status. An in-depth interview schedule (Appendix 1) was used to gather the data.

3.5.2 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were held with seven Muslims involved in community work, and University of Nairobi Muslim academics and administrators. Key informants were also interviewed with a selected number of Muslims involved in community work. The first to be interviewed was the chaplain in-charge of the Muslim students. Others included Muslim academics and administrators.

3.5.3 Narratives

A narrative guide was used to get information from two female Muslim role models who have had an opportunity to access higher education at the University of Nairobi and analyze the impact it has had on their social and economic status.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data was analysed along major themes emerging from the study. Recorded interviews from tapes were transcribed and analysed for content and patterns in the responses. Responses were interpreted by looking at the trends.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher adhered to the code of ethics by informing the respondents on the nature of the research and obtaining their verbal consent. The researcher has treated the information acquired from the respondents with confidentiality. Participants were given the right to refuse and to withdraw co-operation at any time during the research. The participants consented to their real names being used. The study findings are available to the public through the Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies, University of Nairobi.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPACT OF INCREASED ENROLMENT MUSLIM WOMEN IN KENYA

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the emerging trends influencing increased enrolment of Muslim women into higher education and its impact on the community. The first part of this chapter presents the demographic characteristics of the twenty respondents. The rest of the chapter presents findings on the objectives of the study and the discussions on the emerging trends. As much as possible the researcher tried to use the words and expressions of the respondents and their perspectives on the subject under study.

4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 4.1: Types of study participants

Participants	Frequency	Percentage
Respondents	20	74.1
Key informants	5	18.5
Narrators	2	7.4
Total	27	100

4.1.2 Age of Respondents

Age is a demographic factor that affects people's opinions due to experience and knowledge. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 24 years as shown in the table below.

Table 4.2: Age distribution of respondents

Age range in years	18-20	21-23	24-26
Number of respondents	4	10	6

4.1.3 Residence of Respondents

The respondents came from different parts of the country and the information gathered reflects the changing attitude towards women enrolling into institutions of higher education. Some of the respondents came from as far away as Siyu Island off the Lamu Archipelago whereas others came from the far North Eastern Province of the country.

Table 4.3: Residence of the respondents

Province	Number of Respondents
Coast	10
Nairobi	5
North Eastern	5
Total	20

Table 4.4 Level of education of parents

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
None	2	10
Primary	10	50
Secondary	5	25
College	2	10
University	1	5
Total	20	100

4.2 The impact of increased enrolment into higher education on Muslim women

4.2.1 Social status

The respondents reported many different experiences as a result of being enrolled at the university. The following is an excerpt from one of them:

Actually the prophet said educating a man is educating a person whereas educating a woman is educating a society so the more women who come to university the better the society coz they will empower them to be able to support the rest of the families through inspiring others and will think out of the box thus bring up a better generation (Hanifa Ghalib (real name) 24 year old graduating Microbiology student).

The study participants expressed their optimism about being able to complete their studies and be able to inspire other younger women in the community to pursue higher education. The following excerpt reflects how the women will benefit others directly or indirectly.

As an individual I have learnt a lot and have grown, my cousins who are married envy me in terms of being in my place as they never got a chance to pursue education thus I have inspired others to be in this position especially those in high school now who inspire to join university. (Suad Hamid, 22year old Actuarial Science student)

In relation to women's empowerment a majority of the respondents agreed that getting an opportunity to be at the university has offered them a chance to make a difference for themselves.

I do feel empowered and am able to make decisions on my own and my parents now ask me of my opinion on issues that never used to happen before! Young Muslim women should definitely seek higher education and keep good company in school so that one may be influenced by positive friends so that they remain focused. Now the world has become competitive and Muslim women can't afford to be left behind in development and nation building. (Fatma Abubakar, 21 year old, second year Pharmacy student)

4.2.2 Employment prospects, future career prospects)

The role of education is important for women to be able to take advantage of new employment opportunities and increase their income .Most of those interviewed were optimistic about the future in terms of career opportunities and expressed hope that acquiring higher education would allow them access better jobs and earn more money. This will inevitably translate into providing better living standards for themselves and their families

I can offer financial help to them such as paying my brothers school fees and I have people who look upon me and have high expectations from me you know because of poverty a lot of people don't have money so I may be able to offer some medical services (Zanuba Chepkorir,22 year old second year Medical student)

More young Muslim women are choosing career choices that were traditionally meant for men such as engineering and architecture. According to Samira Sheikh Alwy, a third year Architecture student, when she first enrolled at the department she was the only Muslim girl but there have been three more since then so that indicates that females are also changing their attitude and embracing different challenges:

When I first enrolled at the university I was the only Muslim female in my architecture class and initially I was intimidated by the other girls and also because we have more male students in my class. However that seems to have changed coz I believe I can perform even better than some of my classmates and

I have seen that a few more female Muslims have joined the department since then.

4.2.3 Marriage and choice of spouse

With most Islamic communities the institution of marriage and its relevance is an integral part of spirituality and there is a lot of emphasis on the need for women and men to fulfil this part of their religious duty. The average Muslim girl was expected to sit at home and was to be taught, besides cooking and handiwork, moral education: the pressure is even greater due to cultural expectations of child bearing and rearing as their primary responsibility. Therefore for females who have had an opportunity to enrol at the university most often tend to meet like minded colleagues who sometimes end up becoming their spouses. No doubt most of the study participants knew that they will have to go through this rite of passage but at least they seemed focused on who they want to get married to.

I am currently engaged to be married to my cousin but he too is pursuing a degree in Aeronautical Engineering in Canada, I think we can get along because he is exposed in terms of being educated and also living in another country. (Mryah Abdillahi, third year Law student)

I am not sure I want to get married to somebody who has not been to university. You know we may not be able to relate in the same way, all I know is that when that time comes I will look for somebody who can appreciate me and allow me to pursue my career. (Rehana Khan, third year, Bachelor of Arts student)

4.2.4 Empowerment

With the scramble for gender equity the issue of empowerment of women cannot be ignored and in this study I sought to find out whether the study participants felt that having been enrolled at the university had any impact on their outlook towards women and the need to empower them. These were some of their responses.

Empowerment does not necessarily mean being anti-male or something like that its like you have education you can be on an equal footing on decision making with male counterparts and one can make one's own decisions and have their own personality. (Suad Hamid, actuarial science student)

I totally support empowerment of women as I myself feel liberated and in a position to make decisions on my own. Women should definitely pursue higher education so that they may catch up with globalisation. (Zainab Yusuf, 22 year old BA student)

4.2.5 Self-fulfilment and actualisation

The majority of the study participants indicated the reasons they were pursuing their various careers was because that was what they knew they wanted to do since they were young. Having been given the opportunity to be in university is a dream come true for most of these participants because of the cultural constraints that they would normally have faced.

Ever since I was a little girl I have always wanted to become a doctor so when I made the grades and was accepted here at university of Nairobi I was so thrilled!(Nuru Hashim, 22 year old, second year medical student)

For my family they will have given me the chance to pursue my dreams and become a professional and that is immeasurable as educating females is not very common and now more girls are looking forward to joining university. (Maryam Noor, 23 year old Law student)

For the students who demonstrated extreme academic potential and enthusiasm enrolling at the university was the logical thing to do.

4.2.6 Importance of role models

A majority of the girls indicated that the presence of role models greatly inspired them to pursue their studies. Initially most girls did not have appropriate role models who could inspire them to pursue further studies as the women they interacted with were mainly their mothers and aunts whose main activities evolved around marriage and family issues. That trend has however changed as more Muslim women pursue education and enter the formal job market. When I asked the respondents about their role models and those who inspired them most of their responses were as follows:

Yes but she is not that famous just a family member and she was among the first Muslim ladies to come to UON many years ago Her name is Nuru Mahsen and she got married in her first year that didn't prevent her from graduating and further pursuing a postgraduate degree.(Suad Hamid, 20 year old Medical student)

My father is my main role model and despite the fact that he did not get an opportunity to complete his studies he has always shown me that I can make it through hard work. My aunty Aliyah is also another person whom I look up to a lot. She too was able to get a university education and is my current benefactor. She inspired me after telling me her experiences in college and how she successfully completed her studies. She is now financially supporting the rest of her family. (Fatma Abubakar Mohamed, 21 year old Pharmacy student)

Since I was a kid there was a certain Doctor Osigo who has always inspired me to want to become a doctor. So every time I went to see her I would be fascinated by what she was doing, and I also have 3 of my female cousins who are doctors. (Hafswa Taib, 19 year old Medical student)

My elder sister was the first girl from my community to go to university especially that very few girls have had a chance of being educated: so this is a golden opportunity for me to make a difference in my community. (Sumayya Ahmed, 22 year old B.A student)

4.2.6 Postgraduate studies

Education is claimed worldwide as one type of investment on human capital that can contribute to a country's wealth (Rosnani & Abdul Karim, 2000). Thus, it should be perceived as important as other life elements and basic needs as well. From this study, all twenty Muslim female study participants were asked if they perceived education as very important and their response was overwhelming that given an opportunity to pursue postgraduate studies would be a priority for most of them. Among them were those who admitted that they would like to earn some work experience or start families before pursuing further studies.

My dream is to pursue a postgraduate degree and work for KEMRI as the sky is the limit. (Hanan Awadh, 24 year old graduating Microbiology student)

Given an opportunity, I would pursue a postgraduate but not immediately as I will have to focus on my marriage and start a family. (Khadija Mohamed Sudi, 24year old engineering student)

Yes of course there is no doubt that I would like to pursue further education because now everyone has a masters degree and it seems this first degree might not be enough to provide good opportunities for work. (Suhaila Almudy, 23 year old Business Administration student)

I would like to pursue a postgraduate degree and specialise in gynaecology because most women especially Muslim women prefer to be seen by a female doctor as opposed to a male doctor that way I will have more impact on the society (Hafswa Taib, first year Medical student)

Yes of course I would like to pursue a post graduate degree and get married so that I may give my own children more opportunities than those offered to me. (Amal Ahmed Aboud, 23 year old, third year Actuarial Science student)

4.3 The impact of highly educated Muslim women on their community

Women in the Muslim community have proved that they can excel in their pursuit of education and that they can contribute to their general well being. A number of prominent personalities who include women in professional fields such as medicine, law and business are successfully participating in nation building and making a difference at different levels of community development.

4.3.1 Equity and respect for educating girls

The community has generally realised that girls can make positive contributions to their general development and have therefore raised the bar for girls to equally pursue their dreams through acquiring education. Girls are also earning respect from their peers who in turn are aspiring to pursue different careers so they may be able to compete in different professional fields. The notion about girls getting married and taking care of the family is changing as most parents realise that they need to give them the chance to acquire education.

4.3.2 Girls taking over the role of providing for families

The current trend in most communities is women headed households. Most households are faced with challenges of poverty, unemployment, rural-urban migration and Muslims are no exception to the rule. Young men are involved in drug abuse and other vices such as chewing miraa and smoking cannabis. This has forced most women and girls to look for ways of sustaining their families and parents have realised that female children are more reliable and focused and are therefore given opportunities such as going to school. For those who do not have enough grades to pursue university education, they are taking up courses in other institutions such as polytechnics.

I think you are aware of how bad the situation is with our young men at the coast...they don't want to get involved in any constructive work; rather they are wasting their lives away engaging in drug abuse and this is forcing their sisters and mothers to fend for the families. It is a sad turn of events but that's the reality. (Sheikh Abdulatif Abdulkarim, Council of Imams and Preachers)

I know several families that are depending on their daughters to work and provide for them. This is worrying given the fact that women are to be looked after and now the roles seem to be changing and they are taking care of their parents and siblings. It is a good thing that our young women are given a chance to pursue higher education so that they can improve the quality of life of their families. (Sheikh Muhammad Swalihu, Imam Jamia Mosque, Nairobi)

Through urbanisation and the increasing necessity for women to contribute economically in the homes have influenced an attitude change among members of the community and there has been an increased appreciation of education.

4.3.3 Poverty alleviation due to increased employment

Poverty continues to be a major challenge for most families and for any meaningful development to take place all members of the society need to be given opportunities to seek intellectual growth. With more young women getting enrolled at higher institutions there are more opportunities for them to improve the lives of their families and the community at large.

My mother is growing old and I hope to get a good job and financially assist them. Most Muslims focus on medicine but our community needs professionals in all fields so my knowledge in actuarial science will contribute to issues of investments and business advice. (Fatima Dullo, 24 year old economics student)

I have one more year to graduate so I intend to get into the job market immediately and pursue a post grad shortly I really want to advocate for the subject of actuarial science to be able to encourage more young people to take it up professionally. (Salma Suleiman, 23 year old Actuarial Science student)

4.3.4 Empowered community

The society that educates women empowers itself in the sense that these women will in turn empower their children and thus improve the lives of that community. With more women joining the labour force there is demand for them to be at the same level with their male counterparts especially with gender equity. Through human resource, they can participate in nation building and become proud as a community.

Education has made me grow as an individual and that has made me more independent and I would not have had that if I had not been given an opportunity to leave home and pursue a career. The members of my community too have high expectations from me so the more reason I have to excel in my studies so that i do not disappoint them. (Maryam Suleiman, 25 year old, pharmacy student)

4.3.5 Religio -cultural myths debunked

Many Muslim men confuse religion and tradition/culture. They hide under the guise of religion which they do not seem to understand and this initially constituted the main constraint to female education. Islam never forbade any human being to seek education either spiritual or secular. In fact, it urges both men and women to seek either secular or spiritual

education. However, it is now evident that it is no longer practical for any person to hide behind the guise of religion in trying to deny females the opportunity to seek higher education. A key informant put it thus:

Many parents were reluctant to allow their girls travel to Nairobi for university education because of the many incidents of rioting, raping and the freedom which students have in these institutions which could lead to loose morals and girls going astray. The girls have however proved that they can be in university and still preserve their morality and uphold their religious beliefs. (Prof. Hassan AbdulAziz, lecturer Department of Linguistics, UON)

4.3.6 Marriage

The perception of the community on the marriage of girls who have acquired higher education is very positive. The young men who want to marry preferred educated women over those who are not when they indicated a choice of partner

When we carry out marriage counselling here at the mosque we have realised that most of the young men prefer to be paired up with women who have at least acquired university education. When I ask them why they prefer so they say they need a person who can be of help to them not a liability. Can you believe that! (Sheikh Uthman Abdallah, Imam Makina Mosque, Kibera)

4.3.7 Attitudes and perceptions

For a long time females were discriminated against on the basis of cultural and religious myths that justified why they should not be allowed to pursue western education. Some of the females were allowed to attend Islamic school until they reached marriageable age after which they were expected to become housewives and mothers. However, times have changed and it has dawned on most people that there is need to fit in and survive, and sending children to school is one of the ways in which children can be given an opportunity to exploit their talents.

Nowadays most parents have realised that there is no shortcut to life. You must educate both male and female children so that they may be able to fend for themselves. It's not like when we were younger when all emphasis was on boys to be educated and girls to be trained to be good wives. I think now that perception has totally changed and girls are proving to be ready for the challenge. (Anwar Said, youth counsellor, Young Muslim Association)

Parents' attitudes towards educating girls has changed for the better because initially they felt that educating a girl is wasting time and money as she would eventually get married and benefit other people, i.e., the husband and his family. Now more households are female-

headed and girls are taking leadership roles and the community has realised that female empowerment is contributing to social change among the younger generation.

5.1 Discussion

Higher education of women has played an increasingly important role in national development of the country including greater participation in the economy and labour market. Furthermore, education provides better work opportunities and thus increases the level of income of an individual. Therefore, education is perceived to be an important factor in human capital formation.

According to Tzannatos (1999), the returns from investment in education are higher for women. He reasoned that this can be explained by two factors. Firstly, in the case of women, the impact of education does not just limit to additional income, but also to increase their opportunity to participate in the labour-force. Secondly, women also have lower opportunity cost and this can increase the rate of returns. As mentioned by Rosnani and Abdul Karim (2000), education is a type of human capital that gives benefit to the country's economic wealth. Their arguments are further confirmed in this study as many respondents felt that higher education would give them access to better jobs, salaries and living standards.

The study established that it is no longer practical to use religion as an excuse to deny Muslim women higher education, as they are aware of Islam's position on education and seeking knowledge. Furthermore, their presence in university has proved that they can still preserve their morality and uphold their religious beliefs while achieving academic excellence. In Islam, every Muslim is required to acquire knowledge as much as possible. Knowledge generates wealth. Thus, Islam condemns idleness, inactivity and poverty. A Muslim should be actively involved in the pursuit of increasing their knowledge and skill to ensure that their life is not of mere subsistence. To gain (and to spread) knowledge is a kind of jihad. This earns rewards from Allah. Even the first Quranic verse revealed (Al-'Alaq, 96: 1-5) is related to knowledge which plays the main role in education. Allah said in Al-Zumar (39: 9), "... Say, Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition." Other studies have put straight the interpretation of Islam on girls' education (Maina, 2003), arguing fair and square of the right of young Muslim women to access higher education.

According to Rosnani and Abdul Karim (2000), governments are interested in spending money for education due to several reasons. Among them is the need to increase the number of skilled and qualified labour force. Thus, education should be perceived as important to anyone and everyone. From the findings on this study, more than three quarters of the respondents strongly agreed that education is very important. This type of awareness is crucial to ensure that future generations would be free from any illiterate condition. If a woman convincingly agrees that education is very important, her opinion will impact on her children and the next generation as well. This will definitely help the Kenyan government to pursue the National Education Policy (2006) one of whose objectives is to fulfil the needs for human resource in the country, as well as to produce a disciplined, trained and collaborative society.

In her study of British Muslim women and academic achievement, Ahmad (2001) established that academic achievement of Muslim Women is changing the status quo. My study further confirms her arguments that higher education is viewed as an asset in gaining and maintaining social prestige. The women are renegotiating cultural, religious and personal identities in terms of their future relationships and lifestyle choices.

Ijaz and Abbas' (2001) study confirmed that there is a universal belief on the importance of education for young Muslim women *per se* with economic and cultural factors significantly shaping these sentiments. Similarly, the study respondents disclosed that future economic prospects of their careers were a motivation to their pursuing higher education both for themselves and their parents. However, none of the respondents cited cultural factors to have shaped their parents positive attitude towards higher education.

Several studies have discussed Muslim Women's higher education. For example, Pessate-Shubert (2003), in her study of Bedouin women, demonstrated that higher education has contributed to the changing status of Muslim women in two areas, personal and communal. My study findings are in line with her argument that higher education is seen as both a vehicle for personal growth and to help build and give back to their communities. The increase in professionals will no doubt contribute to national development.

Basit's (1997) research on young Muslim women in schools demonstrated how stereotyped attitudes of teachers and career advisers influenced the nature of advice they gave. Contrary

to these findings the study has established a decline in gender stereotypes and has seen more women exploring male dominated fields of study. The respondents were pursuing a wide range of studies; Engineering, Medicine, Law, Actuarial Sciences among others. This further demonstrates the fast changing perceptions, attitudes and practices of higher education amongst Muslim women. Furthermore the study participants indicated their desire to pursue further education.

On the one hand, this study has shown how these women perceive education to be a vehicle towards personal growth and, on the other, we have explored the ways these women present education as something that connects the private and public spheres. For them, education expands their social space and gender equality both within the family and outside of it. Studying and being outside the home expands their social world. Furthermore, post high-school studies increase their attractiveness as brides. The strength of these women's narratives lies in growth emanating from within, founded on the potential of Muslim women and their society. Higher education is indeed outside their world and tradition. However, they are facing new opportunities, making new decisions, and changing perceptions. The Muslim women have known show resistance to their traditional social place in their community, using education as the tool of this resistance. They still build their lives around their domestic domain, but now things are different. Their lives are not only private. Today, younger educated Muslim women build their lives around the opportunities within cultural limits preparing themselves through education to enter the labour market and receive a salary. Some of them delay marriage and childbirth; others use their educational skills to benefit their families. These narratives intersect with two structural changes, firstly, in the gender regime and, secondly, in the position of the Muslim community in Kenya. Educated Muslim women today are better able to decide how to balance their commitment to education and employment than their mothers were.

5.2 Conclusion

Education is an important element in human capital. Investment in education will enhance the skills and knowledge of an individual. An individual with more education will be more productive and subsequently enjoy a higher level of income. This will improve the standard of living of the individual. It is then no doubt that the acquisition of education is vital. From the study, it has been established that Muslim women in Kenya perceive education as being very important. They argued that education can influence future income, since a higher level of education leads to a higher level of income. This perception is crucial and should be taken into account by all stakeholders and policy makers in the education sector so as to enable more Muslim women gain higher education for their personal development and that of society at large. The realization that education is important shows that women are willing to pursue higher education if they are given the opening.

In conclusion, education must be perceived as important by all individuals. A more knowledgeable workforce will certainly ignite the engine of economic growth. Increased enrolment of Muslim women into higher education has positive and long term developmental effects on the women and their communities. This trend must be sustained to enable future generations of Muslim women to participate equally in development.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: In-depth Interview Schedule

code number _____

My name is Rukiyah Mohamed Bakari. I am a student at the University of Nairobi and I am conducting a survey on the education of Young Muslim Women at this University. My focus is on the increasing enrolment of female students and how this might impact on their lives and those of their communities. I would be grateful if you could spare some time and answer a few questions. The information you provide will remain confidential and will not be available to any other person other than the researcher.

1. Briefly tell me about yourself. *probe for Place of birth , age ,siblings, marital status*
2. What course are you studying?
3. What factors determined your enrolment into the University? *What factors led to your joining higher education? Role model*
4. What will this education have on your family?
5. Do you think acquiring higher education will have any impact on your life? *Probe for social setbacks, empowerment, perception towards women acquiring higher education*
6. In your opinion, how will this education impact on your community?
7. Overall, what do you consider to be the main benefits of university education to a Muslim woman, her family and her community?

APPENDIX 2: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Date of Interview -----
2. Name of informant ----- code number
3. Do you think enrolment into University has any impact on the Muslim students and their socialization with other students?
4. Have the female Muslim students' perceptions on acquiring education changed since their increase in numbers?
5. How do you think their enrolment has impacted on their religious beliefs?
6. Are there any cultural/religious obstacles on education of girls?
7. What impact will higher education have on the social orientation of the female students?
8. What impact will higher education have on the economic orientation of the female students?
9. What impact will completing education have on the female students as individuals?
10. Can empowerment of Muslim women affect the community perception of girl education?
11. Does religion play a role in the career the female students choose?