



INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT UNIT

WHERE DO OUR GIRLS GO?

FEMALE DROPOUT IN THE IRC- GUINEA PRIMARY SCHOOLS



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IRC EDUCATION

This report could not have been compiled without the generous assistance of many IRC associates. To Catherine Winter (Regional Project Manager, Gueckedou) we extend our thanks for helping finalize the format of this study. To Saah Musa (Chief School Administrator, N'zerekore), Kwami Adzika (Regional School Administrator, N'zerekore), Patrick Alieu (Regional School Administrator, Gueckedou), Joseph Lartey (Education Coordinator, Gueckedou), and Alphan Massaquoi (Education Coordinator, N'zerekore), we remain grateful for assistance in revising and conducting the student survey. Finally, to the health counselors, principals, parents, and girls of Thuo, Bossou, Lola, Nongoa, Solondin, and Sayanin, we owe a round of applause for their patience and cooperation as we arrived late in their camps, humbugged them with personal questions, savored their food, and drove off again, leaving them to wonder if this particular IRC activity would have any long-term impact.

In the hopes that their assistance and hospitality will not be wasted, and that IRC-Guinea will use this information to develop specific school-based programs for female students, we hereby submit our findings on the educational situation of Liberian and Sierra Leonean girls in IRC refugee camps in Guinea.

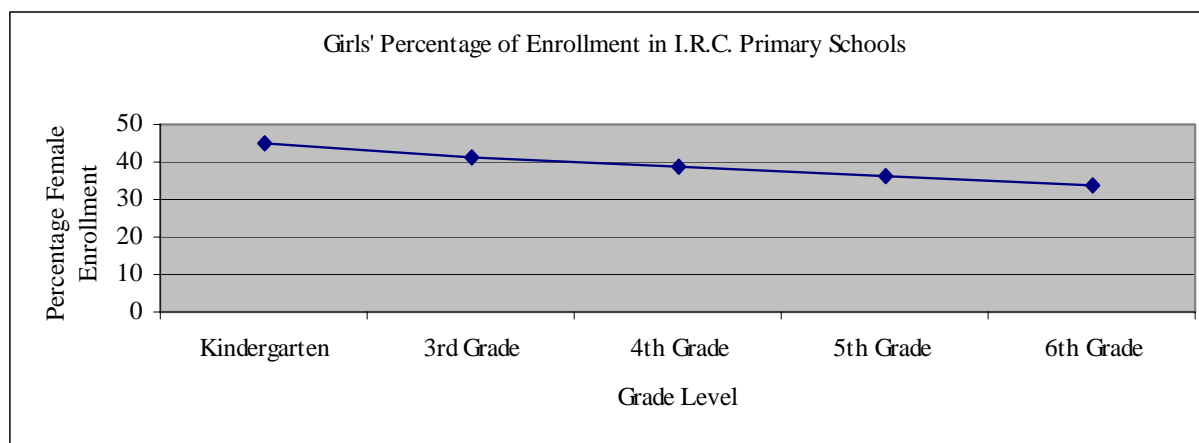
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I. BACKGROUND

Although girls represent almost 50% of the students in the early levels of the IRC schools, they make up only 34% of those who finish the primary cycle (see Chart 1).

Chart 1: Girls' Enrollment in IRC Schools from Kindergarten to 6th Grade¹



The decrease in female enrollment occurs in all four IRC regions, ranging from a drop of six percentage points in Forecariah/Conakry to a drop of eighteen percentage points in the Macenta region.

Table 1: Decreases in Female Enrollment by Region and Grade

Region	Kindergarten	3 rd Grade	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade	Decrease
Macenta	45	42	39	33	27	18%
Gueckedou	47	44	40	38	35	12%
Nzerekore	45	41	36	36	35	10%
Forecariah	43	38	39	35	37	6%

As a tool for determining why a significant number of girls leave the IRC system before the end of their primary education, the IRC health department in 1996 created and distributed a girls' tracking form. This form was to help school administrators tally the reasons why girls from grades 4 to 12 were leaving school. The health department intended, after comparing the reasons most frequently cited in each region, to develop a comprehensive approach to preventing girls from leaving IRC schools.

The report the department compiled covered the period of March to May 1997, and yielded the following information:

- **8 % of girls enrolled in grades 4-12 in N'zerekore, 9% of girls in those grades in Macenta, and 9% of girls in those grades in Gueckedou dropped from school;**
- **The grades with the highest incidence of female dropout were 4,5, and 9;**
- **The 2 most commonly reported causes of female dropout were relocation and pregnancy.**

¹ Enrollment figures taken from IRC school system statistics for July 1998.

However, the 1997 girls' tracking report, left many questions unanswered since many of the principals did not correctly complete this form. For 40% of the girls listed as dropped, administrators specified no reason for those girls' departure from school. This made it difficult to create an exact ranking of reasons for female dropout, and prevented the formation of any plan of action to retain girls in the IRC schools.

II. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This study was intended to examine more carefully the causes of girls' dropout in IRC grades 3-6. Staff conducting the study chose not to focus upon dropouts at the 9th-grade level because many of IRC-Guinea's current programs, including the health talks and Young Women's Social Clubs, focus upon endowing senior high school girls with the self-esteem and contraceptive knowledge necessary to enable them to continue their schooling.

The principal questions this study sought to address were as follows:

- **What do parents and students define as the main reasons for the decline in female enrollment in grades 3-6?**
- **Are these reasons primarily cultural, primarily economic, or do cultural and economic reasons remain inextricably linked in the refugee context?**
- **To what degree are parents implicated in their daughters' departure from school?**
- **To what degree do nationality and location of the refugee camp influence the reasons given for girls' dropout?**

Because this study sought to understand how refugee communities regard education for girls, parents and students (rather than school staff) were targeted as the study's main respondents. This approach was intended to help IRC personnel better understand the refugees' definitions of commonly-cited reasons for girls' dropout (i.e. "lack of sponsor"), and intended to allow those who had abandoned school to describe in detail the circumstances which caused them to leave.

III. METHODOLOGY

The IRC central staff members met with a total of 8 groups of parents and 63 female students to inquire what they viewed as the main causes of female dropout, and what they thought could be done to prevent it. In addition, staff delivered a survey to student respondents in order to collect data on a) family background, b) girls' attitudes about female education, c) the level of guidance they received from the adults in their lives, d) their families' economic status, and e) their knowledge of (and comfort level with) means of contraception.

Of the 8 focus groups organized with parents, 5 groups were Liberian and 3 were Sierra Leonean. Of the 63 student respondents, 25 were Sierra Leonean and 38 were Liberian. Because the study aimed to pinpoint what distinguished girls who attended grades 3-6 from those who had dropped, both enrolled girls and dropout girls were included in the survey. 15 of the Sierra Leoneans interviewed were attending school, while 10 had dropped. 18 of the Liberians interviewed were attending, while 20 had abandoned their studies some time between the 3rd and 6th grade. This made for a total of 33 in-school girls and 30 dropout girls in the survey.

Because IRC was looking for trends common to the entire refugee population, the staff conducting the study attempted to include refugees of diverse ethnic and demographic backgrounds. Liberian parents

from 2 rural and 1 urban refugee camp participated in the focus groups. Sierra Leonean parents from 2 urban and 1 rural refugee camp also contributed. Among the school-going students, 13 were from rural areas (6 Sierra Leoneans and 7 Liberians), while 20 were from urban areas (8 Sierra Leoneans and 12 Liberians). Among the out-of-school students, 16 were from rural areas (7 Sierra Leoneans and 9 Liberians), and 14 were from urban areas (3 Sierra Leoneans and 11 Liberians).

Table 2: Nationalities and Demographics of Parent Groups

	Liberian Urban	Liberian Rural	Sierra Leonean Urban	Sierra Leonean Rural	Total
Parents' Groups	1 camp	2 camps	2 camps	1 camp	6 camps
In-School Girls	11	7	9	6	33
Out-of-School Girls	11	9	3	7	30
Total Girls	22	16	12	13	63

Of the in-school girls, 7 had just completed 3rd grade, 9 had just completed 4th grade, 6 had just completed 5th grade, and 11 had finished the 6th grade. Their average age was 13.2 years. Of those who had dropped, 6 had left during 3rd grade, 5 during 4th grade, 9 during 5th grade, and 10 during 6th grade. Their average age at the time they left school was 15.3 years.² Representatives of 12 ethnic groups participated in the focus groups, surveys, and interviews.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the research team had every intention of sampling in such a way for students and parents of all backgrounds and ethnic groups be represented, several factors prevented them from fully achieving this goal. These included:

- **Because school was out of session, researchers had to rely on principals to assemble those parents and teachers willing to participate in the study;**
- **Restrictions on travel and overnight stays in the Gueckedou (Sierra Leonean) region;**
- **Difficulties in acquiring reliable transportation excluded some camps from involvement in the research agenda;**
- **Poor road conditions meant less time was spent in each camp than had been originally anticipated.**

These complications resulted in a) far fewer parents being addressed than had originally been planned, b) a less systematic sampling of ethnic groups than was envisioned, and c) a lack of input from urban Sierra Leoneans. This last drawback was exacerbated by the fact that, in the one urban setting where we did have the chance to interview Sierra Leonean girls, the principal of the school was unable to convince any dropout girls to meet with us.

Due to these difficulties, it is inadvisable to generalize too greatly from this study, either about refugee parents' attitudes towards their daughters' schooling, or about differences between ethnic groups or urban

² Refugees' long absences from school often place them in grade levels considered 'sub-standard' for their age in the U.S.

and rural populations. Nonetheless, the data presented in the next section will hopefully provide the groundwork for an improved understanding of the factors inhibiting Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugee girls' participation in the IRC schools.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite the study's limitations, several clear patterns emerged from our discussions with parents and students. These patterns bring us one step closer to answering the questions posed at the beginning of our study.

A. Parents' Perspectives

In the first two rural Liberian camps, IRC staff met separately with fathers and mothers to discover whether they would suggest different reasons why girls in the early primary grades drop from school. Because of time constraints, in the 3rd Liberian camp and the 3 Sierra Leonean camps, staff met with all parents together.

Table 3 indicates some causes of female dropout as they were mentioned and prioritized by each group of parents. A rank of "1" indicates a group thought that reason most important.

Table 3: Causes of Female Dropout as Ranked by Liberian and Sierra Leonean Parents

Parent Group	Preg-nant	Alone	Love for \$	No Discip-line	Work at home	Lack of attire	Mar-ried	Farm Work	Repati-ation	Girls don't obey	Bad Marks	No School For Girls	Mom alone
Thuo Wmn	1	2	4	-----	7	6	-----	5	-----	11	3	8	9
Thuo Men	----	2	-----	-----	1	5	----	3	4	----	-----	-----	----
Bosso u Wmn	1	7	-----	2	-----	4	-----	3	-----	----	-----	-----	6
Bosso u Men	1	5	3	2	-----	----	-----	----	4	-----	-----	6	----
Lola	8	11	3	7	2	-----	1	----	4	-----	5	6	9
<i>Solon Din</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	-----	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>4</i>	----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----
<i>Sayan in</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>6</i>	-----	----	<i>4</i>	-----	-----	<i>5</i>	-----	-----	----
<i>Nong oa</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	-----	<i>6</i>	-----	<i>4</i>	-----	-----	<i>5</i>	-----	-----	-----

These results confirm that, in the four sex-segregated focus groups, there were no great differences between the causes of dropout by men and women. Although women tended to emphasize single motherhood's influence on female dropout more than men, and only the two men's groups mentioned repatriation as a significant influence, the response pattern for the sex-segregated groups did not differ in any other important respect.

There were, however, some interesting differences between the Liberian and Sierra Leonean focus groups. 3 of the 5 groups of Liberians spoke openly about prejudices against girls' schooling in their

communities; none of the Sierra Leonean groups mentioned this subject. All three of the Sierra Leonean groups suggested that early marriage often deterred girls from continuing school; this was not a factor stressed by the Liberian parents. Finally, only one of the Liberian groups indicated that girls' disobedience to their parents was a catalyst for leaving school, while two of the Sierra Leonean groups placed this among the contributors to female dropout.

These differences in response and prioritization suggest that beliefs about girls' responsibility to their parents and future husbands might have a greater influence on girls' school careers in the Sierra Leonean context than in the Liberian context. This might explain why Sierra Leoneans were less willing to discuss prejudices against women's schooling, why early marriage seemed to play such a significant role in their daughters' lives, and why girls' disobedience towards their parents was repeatedly mentioned during the focus groups.

When the parents' responses are examined regardless of nationality, other patterns emerge. Table 4 indicates how many of the 8 parent groups selected causes for dropout, and provides an average of the groups' estimations. (In this analysis, the lower the average the MORE significant the parents held the reason to be in causing dropout).³

Table 4: Causes of Dropout Ranked by Number of Selections and Average Significance

Level of Significance	Reason	# of Times Selected	Significance
Highly Significant	Pregnancy	7	.25
	Children Alone	8	.28
Significant	Sexual Relations for Money	5	.53
	Parental Discipline Lacking	5	.55
	Domestic Work	5	.56
	Lack of Clothes/Shoes	5	.58
Somewhat Significant	Marriage	4	.61
	Farm Work	3	.72
	Repatriation	3	.73
Marginally Significant	Girls Disobedient	3	.81
	Bad Marks	2	.82
	Girls Shouldn't Attend	2	.83
	Mothers Alone	3	.84

From these results, we can see that parents identified 2 highly significant causes of dropout, 4 significant causes, 3 of which were sometimes significant, and 4 which might have an influence on enrollment, but were not considered consistent impediments to girls' education.

The 2 highly significant causes of dropout, pregnancy and children living alone, are often interrelated. According to parents, girls who are on their own in camp situations frequently become pregnant as they turn to men for economic support. The reasons parents mentioned for girls surviving on their own included: a) children leaving their family because they can no longer be supported, b) children who have always lived alone, c) children who 'repatriate' with their families only to return to Guinea to attend school, and d) children who leave their family in one town to continue their schooling in another. Although living alone is certainly not the only cause of pregnancy among refugee girls, it places girls under economic constraints, which greatly contribute to the unwanted pregnancies and dangerous

³ This average was computed by dividing the rank a group gave a reason by 14. The resulting scores for each reason were then summed, with a score of 1 attributed to any reason a group had not chosen. The sum was then divided by 8 to determine the average importance all the groups attributed to that reason.

abortions that shorten the school careers of girls in the upper primary grades.

The next category indicating significant causes of dropout, includes factors linked to the girls' economic situation, (i.e. the need to exchange sexual relations for money, and the lack of proper clothing/shoes for school), as well as two factors linked to the girls' role as children. Of these factors, the groups ranked parental incompetence as a bigger influence on girls' attendance than domestic chores. According to the study participants, heads of households often feel unable to devote the time and/or energy required to ensure that their teenager is attending school regularly. More so than household obligations, this 'disconnect' at the family level results in girls prioritizing other economic and social activities above their schooling.

Surprisingly, "marriage," overall ranked as only somewhat significant, while "girls' disobedience," and "girls shouldn't attend" ranked in the marginally significant category in the study. If the majority of refugee parents had a strong cultural bias against their girl children attending school, these causes for dropout might be expected to rank as "highly significant." The fact that they fall near the bottom of the list suggests that, overall, Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugee parents are not actively discouraging their daughters from attending school.

This data from parental focus groups provides the following answers to the questions posed at the beginning of the study:

- **Parents define pregnancy and solitary living as the two leading causes of female dropout in the IRC schools;**
- **Parents attribute these phenomena to economic pressures rather than traditional cultural beliefs about the role of women or the importance of girls' schooling;**
- **Parents do not feel they are implicated in their daughters' departures from school; they feel they have insufficient influence over their daughters' schooling decisions.**
- **Although nationality may be somewhat linked to pressures for early marriage, (i.e. this may happen more frequently in the Sierra Leonean context), both Liberian and Sierra Leonean rural and urban parents have similar positive opinions about the utility of girls' education and similar conceptions of the factors inhibiting greater female participation in the IRC schools.**

B. Students' Perspectives

Having completed the parental focus group portion of this study, IRC staff interviewed 33 in-school students and 30 dropouts to complement the information the parents had provided. The parents' assertion that pregnancy, even at the primary level, is a major cause of dropout was immediately confirmed; 21(70%) of the 30 out-of-school girls in our sample had left school to have a child⁴. However, the team wanted to clarify how cultural, familial and economic circumstances combine to limit girls' participation in school. They accomplished this by conducting a survey on girls' a) attitudes about female education, b) family background and scholastic support, c) economic strategies, and d) knowledge of and comfort with contraception with all 63 girls.

B.1) Girls' Attitudes Towards Female Schooling:

This portion of the survey aimed to discover a) whether in-school and out-of-school girls believed education was useful for girls, b) whether in-school and out-of-school girls had the same ideas about how far a girl should go in school, c) whether they had the same appreciation of girls' intelligence, and d) what would encourage a young mother to send her female child rather than her male child to school. The study

⁴ Of the remaining 9, 7 had left to look for work, and 2 had left to recover from an unspecified 'sickness.'

team hypothesized that in-school girls would be much more enthusiastic about female education than out-of-school girls. However, the data we collected did not confirm this supposition.

In-school girls and out-of-school girls unanimously agreed that education for women was important, emphasizing such reasons as a) supporting oneself, b) supporting one's family/relatives, c) escaping humiliation from men who can trick you, and d) finding a dependable job (see Table 5)⁵. Although out-of-school girls insisted slightly more on the value of education as a means of learning to support oneself, there was little other variation in the reasons participants gave for schooling girls.

Table 5: In-School Girls' and Out-of-School Girls' Reasons Why Girls Should Attend School

Category	Support Oneself	Support One's Family	Stand Up To Men	Find a Job	Find a Husband	Self-Improvement
In-school	8	7	6	6	3	3
Out-of-school	12	4	6	5	2	1

While the two groups seemed to be in agreement that school attendance would help a girl avoid depending on men, they differed in how far they thought a girl should continue in school. Most in-school girls thought a girl should pursue her studies to the college level; the bulk of those who had dropped out thought that reaching the 12th grade was sufficient. Essentially, the out-of-school group was less convinced that a girl could remain not pregnant or unmarried long enough to progress to college.

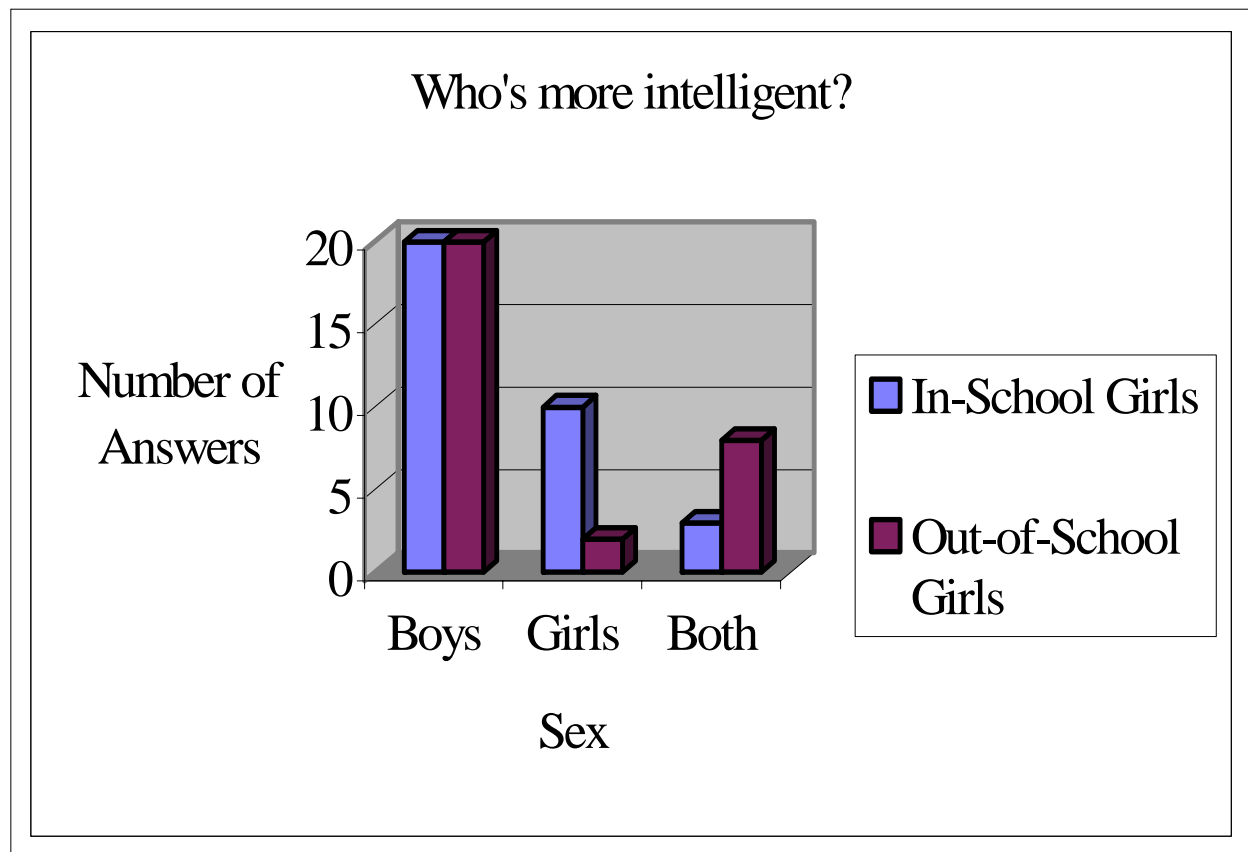
Table 6: Girls' Estimations of How Far a Female Student Should Continue in School

Category	Primary School	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-11	12 th Grade	College
In-school	2	0	0	13	18
Out-of-school	0	1	4	18	7

Even though both groups felt schooling (at least until 12th grade) was important for girls, questions about boys' and girls' relative intelligence revealed a strong bias in favor of male students. The majority of respondents in both groups consistently answered that boys were much more intelligent than girls. Although 10 in-school girls declared that girls are more intelligent, and 8 dropouts thought both sexes were equally intelligent, most participants were clearly convinced their male peers were more academically capable.

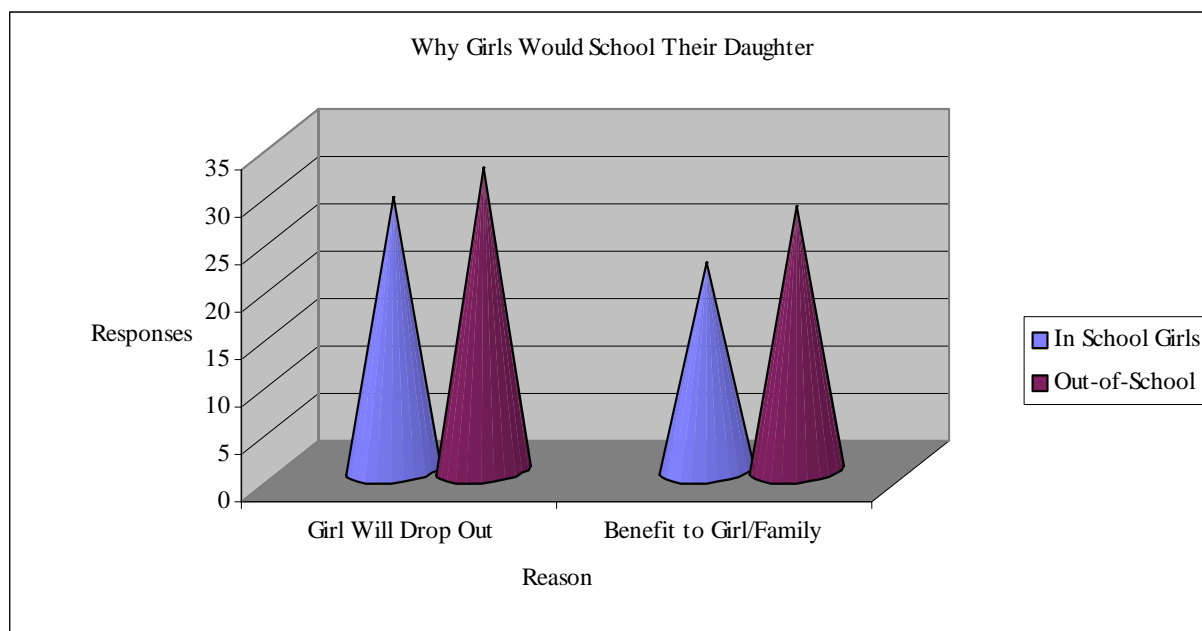
⁵ 'Finding a job' is distinct from 'supporting oneself'; the first implies securing steady employment, the second acquiring a skill set that will allow you to 'get by' for the rest of your life in a series of different activities.

Chart 2: In-School and Out-of-School Girls' Sex-Based Intelligence Ranking



The belief that girls are destined to do poorer in school was even more noticeable when staff asked whether participants would send their daughter or son to school if they only had money to educate one child. Even though half the participants from each group said that they would send their daughter, over 50% of those explained that they would choose to send their young girl rather than their young boy because “a girl has to try hard to learn before she drops out.” Only 21% of in-school girls, and 23% of out-of-school girls thought female children should be given schooling preference because of the benefit it would afford them and their families. Although in-school girls may not be under explicit pressure from their parents to abandon their studies, the majority of them do not think girls are likely to complete their schooling.

Chart 3: In-School and Out-of-School Girls' Reasons for Giving Schooling Preference to Daughters



So far, we have discussed trends common to all in-school and all out-of-school girls. However, dividing our data on attitudes by nationality allows us to perceive significant differences between Sierra Leonean and Liberian girls, particularly for the in-school group. 86% of in-school Sierra Leoneans were convinced that boys were more intelligent, and 60% selected to send a young boy child rather than a female to school. In contrast, only 38% of in-school Liberians viewed boys as more intelligent, and only 38% thought they would rather send their male child to school. The difference for the out-of-school group was not quite as large but was still perceptible; 70% of out-of-school Sierra Leoneans (as opposed to 65% of Liberians) felt that boys were more intelligent, and 50% (as opposed to 40% of out-of-school Liberians) said they would rather send their male child to school (see Table 7). Of the 50% electing to school their girl child, all but one said they would do so primarily out of self-interest; it was held that educated girls would be more likely to care for their elderly mothers than would educated boys.

Table 7: Attitudes about Girls' Schooling by Nationality

Question Category	Sierra Leonean	Liberian
In-school girls saying boys are more intelligent	86%	38%
Out-of-school girls saying boys are more intelligent	30%	25%
In-school girls opting to school a girl child	40%	62%
Out-of-school girls opting to school a girl child	50%	60%
In-school girls' main reason for schooling a girl child	Uneducated boys have opportunities	Girls must learn before dropping out
Out-of-school girls' main reason for schooling a girl child	Girls will help their mothers	Girls must learn before dropping out

In analyzing this data about girls' attitudes towards female education, we can conclude that:

- Both in-school and out-of-school girls conceive education as valuable for girl children;
- Both live in a milieu where boys are viewed as more intelligent than girls;
- Both live in a milieu where girls are expected to drop out of school;
- Girls may achieve less academically because of these subtly perpetuated beliefs about academic inferiority;
- These beliefs about girls' academic inferiority (and concomitant ones about the irrelevance of education to girls' household duties) may have a greater influence on Sierra Leonean girls than Liberian.

B.2) Refugee Girls' Family Scholastic Support:

Since neither Liberian nor Sierra Leonean girls seemed convinced they could succeed in school as well as boys, it seemed that all refugee girls were in need of significant family encouragement to continue their schooling. The research group investigated how much familial scholastic support both groups of girls received by inquiring a) who decided that the girl should attend school, b) who provided advice to the girl about school, c) who helped check the girl's work, and d) what the parents' reaction would be (or had been) if (or when) the girl left school.

The picture these questions created was perhaps the starkest of the entire survey. In every category, for both nationalities, out-of-school girls had received far less scholastic guidance from their family and friends than in-school girls. In the majority of in-school girls' families, an adult had taken the decision to enroll the child in school. However, for the majority of out-of-school girls, they had enrolled themselves. Likewise, in-school girls tended to receive a far greater share of advice on school matters and greater attention to their schoolwork; 93% reported that someone in their family spoke regularly with them about the importance of school, and 91% of them could name someone who routinely looked over their copybooks or asked a teacher about their progress. By contrast, only 44% of those out-of-school said someone had habitually reminded them of the value of schooling, and only 14% of them could name anyone who had ever checked their work, helped them with a problem, or asked to see their report card. These results (see Table 8) emphatically underscored the parents' assertions that girls' "lack of sponsorship" (i.e. not having an adult to provide for you and encourage you) and "living alone" have dramatic effects on girls' school success.

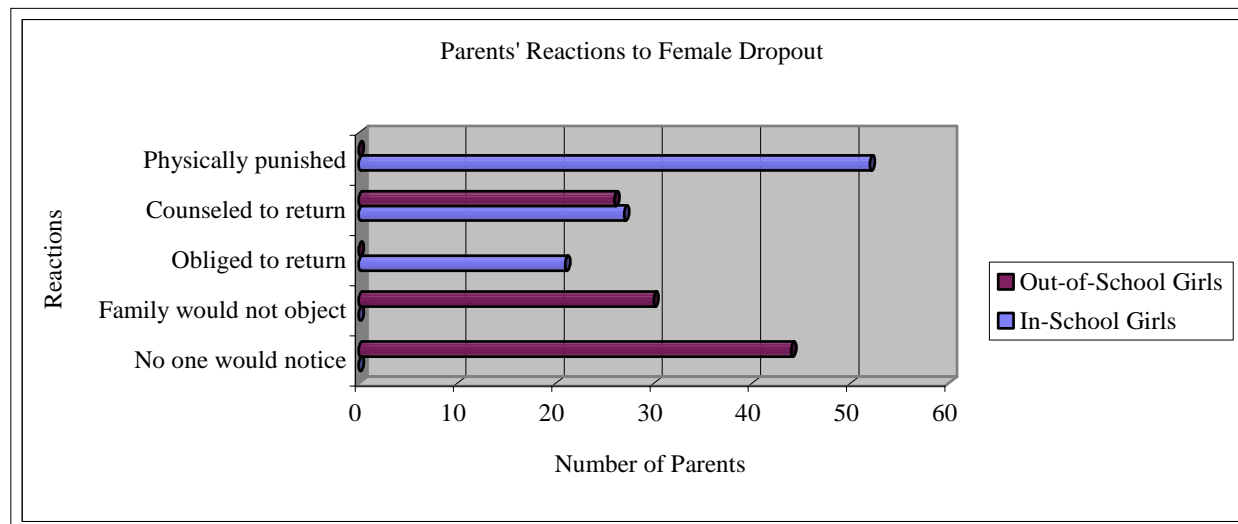
Table 8: Comparison of Family Scholastic Guidance for In-School Girls and Out-of-School Girls

	Enrollment Decision			School Advice			Help With School Work	
	In-School	Out-of-School		In-School	Out-of-School		In-School	Out-of-School
Parent	21	8	Parent	13	3	Parent	9	1
Extended Family	10	8	Extended Family	18	5	Extended Family	21	3
Friend	-----	-----	Friend	2	4	Friend	-----	-----
Guardian	-----	3	Guardian	0	1	Guardian	-----	-----
Self	2	11	Self	-----	-----	Self	2	11
None	NA	NA	None	-----	17	None	NA	NA

When asked what their parents or guardians would do if they left school, the two groups also presented very different responses. 27% of in-school girls said they would be counseled to return to school, 21% said they would be obliged to do so, and 52% responded that they would be beaten, deprived of food, or kicked out of their house if they abandoned their studies. In contrast, only 26% of the out-of-school group said that one of their friends or relatives had tried to make them to return to school. 44% of the out-of-school group said that no one had noticed when they dropped out, and the remaining 30% claimed their relatives had not disapproved of their departure from school because it meant that a) they could

better assist the family or b) they were safely ensconced with their boyfriend's relatives pending the birth of a child.

Chart 4: Parental Responses to Girls Dropping Out of School



Looking at this chart, it is easy to see how the methods parents employ to keep their children in school could contribute to an adolescent's desire to move away from her family as soon as possible. When parents make nourishment, lodging, and physical comfort dependent upon their children's attendance at school, they may unwittingly be encouraging their girls to find boyfriends and other means of support which will enable them to move away from their parents' school-linked disciplinary actions.

From these data we can conclude that:

- **In-school girls receive substantially more familial guidance on academic matters than out-of-school girls;**
- **Relatives of girls who have dropped from school are often uninterested in the outcome of the girls' schooling and/or pleased if the girl is able to contribute to the family or support herself;**
- **Girls who remain in school may do so because they fear the punishment their relatives will inflict on them if they abandon their studies;**
- **Parents' methods of 'encouraging' girls to attend school may contribute to girls' decisions to leave their parents' households as soon as they find a means of surviving alone.**

B.3) Refugee Girls' Family Background:

In order to understand how some families could take such an active interest in their girls' education and how others could seem so disinterested, the research team gathered more detailed information about the participants' family situations. Did in-school girls have more adults living with them? Were those adults more closely related to them? Did they have more secure (and possibly better paid) jobs? Did the adults' level of schooling differ greatly between the two groups? Were the adults living with out-of-school girls less likely to send any of the female children under their care to school? Answers to these questions gave the research team a clearer picture of whether the families' level of involvement with female education correlated with economic pressures, or with traditional cultural beliefs.

Although answers to our questions did not differ much between nationalities, a comparison of the responses of all 33 in-school girls with all 30 out-of-school girls indicates that those attending school

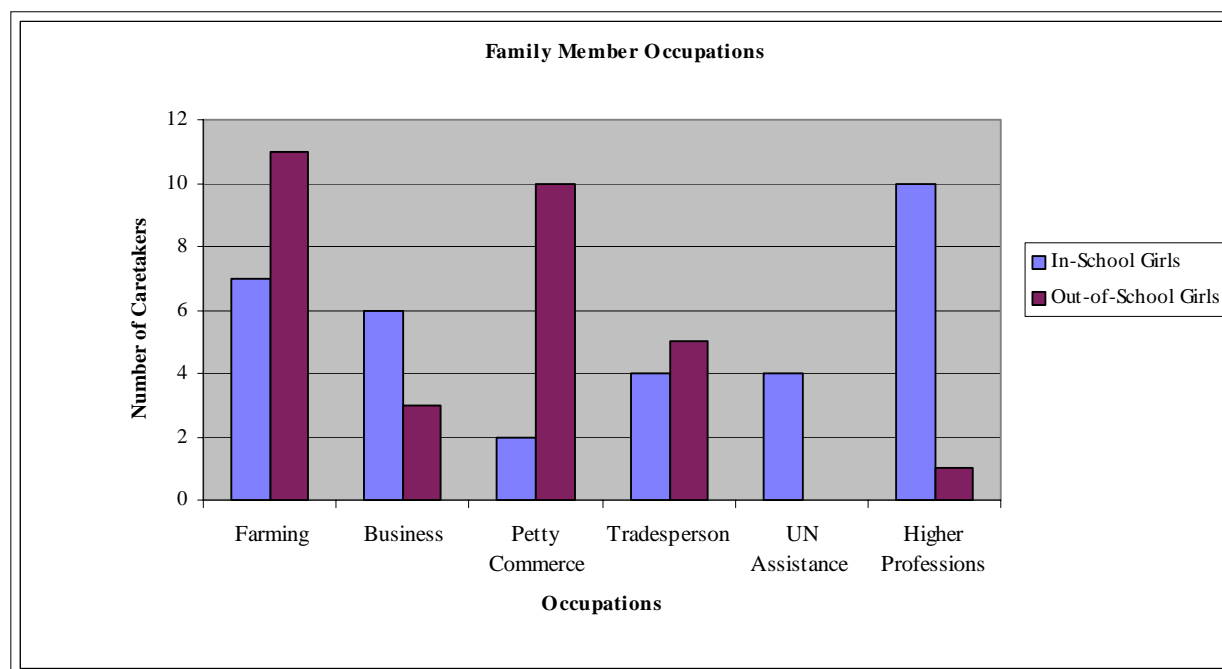
were much more likely to have at least 2 adults in their home, and were much more likely to be living with at least one of their natural parents (see Table 9).

Table 9: In-School and Out-of-School Girls' Family Composition

Group	Both Parents	One Parent; One Extended Family Member	Two Extended Family Members	Two Guardians	One Parent	One Extended Family Member	One Guardian	Alone	Total
In-School	28%	30%	24%	----- -----	18%	-----	-----	-----	100%
Out-of-School	3%	3%	17%	3%	23%	27%	14%	10%	100%

Not only were school-going girls living more often with direct relatives who might be expected to be more interested in their academic success than extended family members, they were also living with adults whose work situation might have afforded them more leeway to focus upon their children's education. Adults living with in-school girls exhibited a larger number of stable occupations, including teaching, nursing, and working on long-term UN contracts. By contrast, the families of girls not attending school earned the majority of their income from farming and petty trade. Although it would be a mistake to assume that this disparity is universally correlated with a difference in the wealth of the two groups (many employed in UN assistance, teaching, or nursing only receive a pittance as a stipend), it is certainly correlated with a reliable source of income which allows the caretakers to contribute to the children's nutritional and material needs

Chart 5: Occupations of In-School Girls and Out-of-School Girls' Caretakers



While girls' participation in school seemed strongly linked to the number of close relatives a girl could rely upon, and the occupations of those relatives, it did not seem to correlate either with the schooling

experience of a girls' caretaker, or with the number of other school-eligible girls in the household attending an IRC school. Parents of in-school girls, on average, had only 2 more years of schooling than the average parent of an out-of-school girl. Perhaps most significantly, the female siblings of out-of-school girls seemed to participate in schooling at a greater rate than those of in-school girls. This data suggests that even less educated Liberian and Sierra Leonean caretakers approve of schooling for girl children, and that, although they may be less willing or able to offer scholastic support, they are rarely actively restricting girls from attending school.

Table 10: In-School and Out-of-School Girls' Caretakers' Schooling and Siblings' Attendance

Category	Caretakers' Average Years of Schooling	% Eligible Female Siblings at School	% Eligible Male Siblings at School
In-School Girls	6.1 years/person	88%	86%
Out-of-School Girls	4.0 years/person	93%	94%

From these results, we can conclude that:

- **Out-of-school refugee girls are more likely than in-school girls to live with people who are less committed to monitoring their school progress (i.e. members of their extended family, or guardians);**
- **Out-of-school refugee girls are more likely to live on their own and attempt to support themselves;**
- **Out-of-school refugee girls' families have less steady income than in-school refugee girls' families;**
- **The lack of familial academic guidance we have observed for out-of-school girls is due more to their family composition and economic situation than to their parents' disapproval of female education;**
- **Out-of-school girls are not under active parental pressure to abandon their studies because of their sex.**

B.4) DropOuts' Economic Strategies

The composition and economic situation of a refugee girl's family clearly influence whether anyone she lives with will emphasize her academics enough that she can succeed even though girls are expected to drop out. However, some argue that girls' dropout cannot be wholly attributed to the economic strain dominating the lives of most refugees. Refugee boys whose family situations deprive them of academic counseling and economic support frequently successfully continue their studies while participating in a variety of moneymaking activities (e.g. fishing, trapping, house repair, chopping wood, farming, doing labor). *What prevents refugee girls who have to provide for themselves from achieving a similar balance?* Our research team aimed to find out by examining a) how those who had to provide for themselves managed to do so, and b) how many of those who were self-supporting had moneymaking strategies that could be combined with attendance at school.

While all the in-school girls were being provided for either by a parent (55%) or close relative (45%), 84% of out-of-school girls were contributing to their own upkeep, and 44% named themselves as their primary source of food and income. 74% of those supporting themselves were involved in selling something, from bread they would bake to charcoal they would gather from woodcutters in the bush. 10% performed odd jobs at other people's houses (i.e. washing, babysitting, cooking), 10% did their own subsistence farming, and .06% earned money or food by carrying people's loads, cleaning their yards, and performing other miscellaneous labor.

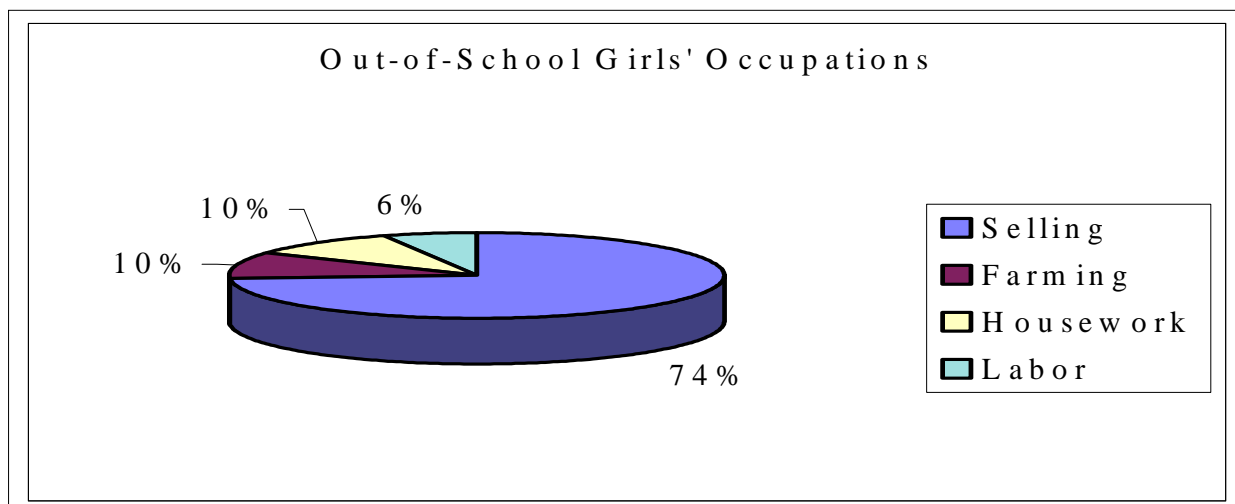


Chart 6: Out-of-School Girls' Occupations

Unfortunately, this study did not compile specific information about refugee boys' economic activities, particularly those having to do with commerce. However, it is likely that, in all the economic sectors, refugee girls fare less well than their male counterparts. In terms of selling, the items refugee girls market are probably a) fewer in number b) harder to find or create, and c) less valuable than those most boys sell. Boys, for example, can hunt and trap high-priced food items like bush rats and fish at little monetary cost. The food girls sell (i.e. baked goods) requires purchasing and combining ingredients, and will never fetch as high a price. Likewise, girls are less likely to be reimbursed as well in farming, labor, and housework; they will inevitably be assigned smaller tasks to accomplish, and will not be able to earn as much.

The limited number of possibilities girls have for making money on their own, and the fact that they rarely can earn as much as a self-supporting boy, are complemented by a strong culturally perpetuated conviction that women should be supported by men. Therefore, refugee girls in stressful economic circumstances, rather than battling against the market odds to maintain themselves, often seek out a relationship with an older man whom they hope will provide for their basic needs. This tendency was extremely evident among the participants in our study. While only 8 (24%) of the girls currently in school said they were relying on monetary help from a boyfriend, 25 (83%) of the 30 out-of-school girls had been depending on an older boyfriend when they were still enrolled in school. 21 of these became pregnant, which ended their school careers before they finished the 6th grade.

It is clear from this section that:

- **Refugee girls who have to support themselves rely heavily on petty trade;**
- **Their ability to earn what they need is limited because the marketplace is structured in such a way that it favors males;**
- **Refugee girls therefore find it easier (and even culturally encouraged), to enter into relationships with men in exchange for economic support;**
- **This strategy for economic survival often results in pregnancies, which terminate the girls' school careers.**

B.5) Girls' Knowledge of and Comfort With Contraception:

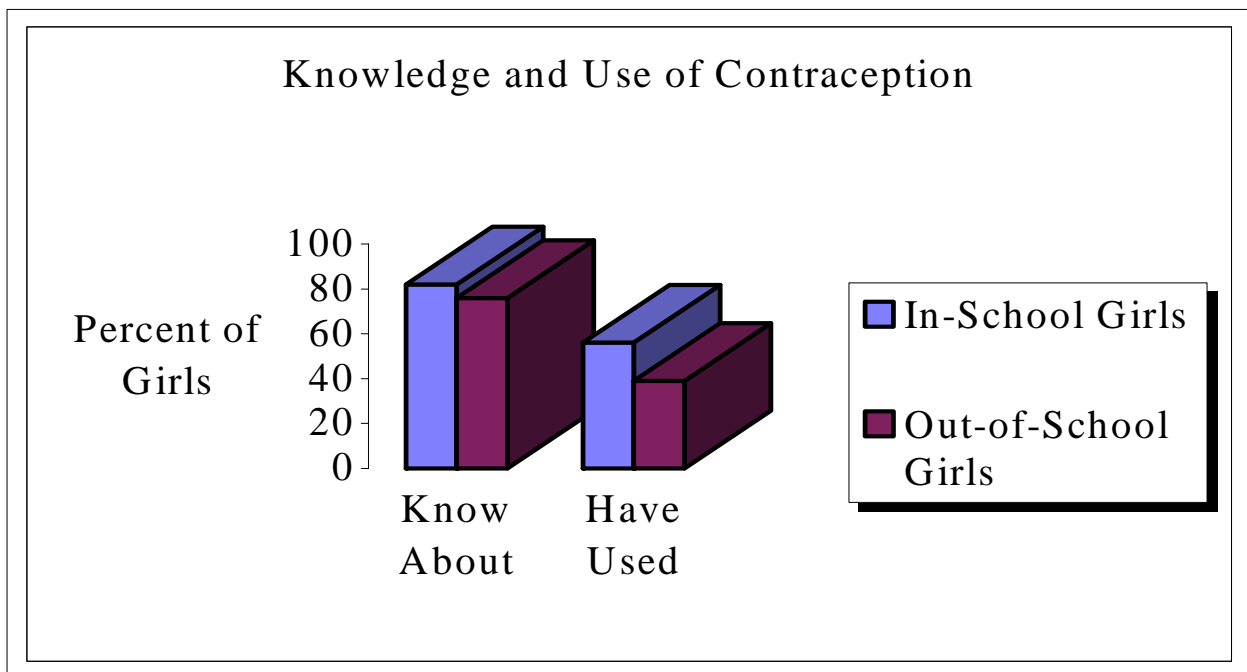
The frequency of teenage pregnancy among the participants in our sample made it obligatory to inquire whether out-of-school girls were becoming pregnant because a) they knew less about contraception than

in-school girls, b) they had practiced contraceptive methods less than sexually active in-school girls, c) they were less comfortable discussing contraception with a partner than in-school girls or d) they were under greater pressure to eschew contraception than in-school girls. Answering these questions assisted us in uncovering how pregnancy becomes the leading cause of IRC female primary school drop out.

Both groups of girls expressed a high level of knowledge about the following contraceptive methods: a) abstinence, b) rhythm, c) condoms, and d) contraceptive tablets. All but the 6 youngest in-school girls knew how pregnancy occurred and that one or more of these methods could prevent it. Although 7 of the out-of-school girls claimed that they had not been familiar with contraception at the time of their first pregnancy, all 30 stated that they now knew how to prevent another pregnancy from occurring.

Of the 27 in-school girls who said they knew how to use one or more contraceptive method, 15 (56%) indicated that they had experimented with the rhythm method, condoms, or tablets in the past. However, of the 23 out-of-school girls who had known about birth control before they left school, only 9 (39%) said they had tried to use it. This lower percentage of birth control use may well have contributed to the 21 pregnancies, which eliminated the majority of the dropout girls from school.

Chart 7: Girls' Knowledge and Use of Contraceptive Methods



For both in-school and out-of-school girls, a major deterrent to the use of birth control was their ability to discuss contraception with their boyfriends. Only 12 in-school girls and 10 out-of-school girls said they felt comfortable telling their boyfriends they needed to use some form of prevention. 17 in-school girls and 12 out-of-school girls stated that they would not ever feel capable of discussing contraception with a lover. This pattern resurfaced even among those who had used contraception; 10 of the 15 in-school girls and 8 of the 9 out-of-school girls who had tried it had used birth control pills without their boyfriend's knowledge.

Silence about contraception is exacerbated for poorer girls where their economic supporter may pressure them to bear a child. 1/3 of those who had dropped from school because of pregnancy claimed that their boyfriend had "begged them to born for him." Uncomfortable with the subject of contraception in the

first place, and dependent upon their lover for food and money, these girls granted their boyfriend's request rather than risk pushing him away by insisting on contraception.

This supplemental information about girls' knowledge of and comfort with contraceptive methods indicates:

- **Both in-school and out-of-school girls understand the mechanics and methods of contraception;**
- **Both in-school and out-of-school girls encountered difficulty in discussing contraceptive methods with their boyfriends;**
- **Out-of-school girls had used contraception slightly less than in-school girls;**
- **This was partly due to the fact that out-of-school girls' economic situation prevented them from insisting that their partners spare them a pregnancy.**

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The material above provides us with a comprehensive picture of the economic and social factors, which interfere with refugee girls' completion of the primary grades in IRC schools. From the parents' perspective, girls drop from school due to pregnancies that occur because they disobey their parents or they are not living with adults who monitor their activities. From the girls' perspective, girls drop from school because a) they are *a priori* unlikely to succeed in comparison to boys, b) their family does not actively encourage them to continue, c) they become pregnant through a sexual relationship they need to support themselves, or d) they become pregnant because they prefer men to support them than to secure housing, food, and physical comfort by fulfilling their parents' demand that they attend school. For girls, these pregnancies usually occur because a) they hesitate to discuss contraception with their boyfriends, and/or b) their boyfriends reject the idea of preventing pregnancy and pressure them to produce a child.

We can now return to the questions we posed at the beginning of this study. We have determined that:

- **Pregnancy and lack of parental input were the main causes of female dropout in our study.** This confirmed that parents' assertions that premature sexual activity and 'lack of sponsorship' (i.e. adult care and supervision) are the primary impediments to a girls' completion of the primary cycle. Although other considerations, such as work at home and lack of proper clothing also play a significant role in discouraging a girl from attending school, they do not have nearly the impact on female enrollment as pregnancy and lack of adult guidance.
- **Girls do not end up living on their own and/or pregnant because of an active attempt on their parents' part to limit their education, but because of culturally conditioned choices they make to ease their economic situation.** Refugee girls who have decided by the age of 13 that girls are less intelligent and less likely to finish school than boys are also surviving on very little food and money. Lacking the encouragement of an adult to counteract their culturally ingrained beliefs that girls are less academically capable, they often choose the most expedient and culturally acceptable means of satisfying their material needs (i.e. finding a man to provide for them). Because it is difficult for them to discuss with their boyfriends the possibility of using birth control, and because they cannot refuse to bear a child for someone who is supporting them, their relationships often result in a childbirth that stifles their school careers.

- **Parents, extended family members, and guardians rarely force their girls to leave school. However, they may contribute to female dropout through inattention to girls' schoolwork, severe school-linked disciplinary measures, and/or complacency about their daughters' dropping out.** Our study suggests that girls who are not living with their parents are much more likely to leave school, because they have no one to monitor their academic performance. Furthermore, even those who are living with their parents may finally dropout and move out on their own because their parents have imposed strict school-related disciplinary measures, (e.g. making food dependent upon school attendance). In the most severe cases, parents do not object if a girl leaves school to look for work, and they welcome girls' dependent relationships with men who contribute to the girls' upkeep (especially if the girl gives to her family some of what she receives from her boyfriend).
- **Girls make their own decisions to abandon schooling.** Either because they are living alone, living with people who don't care if they drop, or living with parents whom they are willing to disobey, refugee girls who leave school usually choose to do so without any overt pressure from the adult community. Most often, this decision is made to avoid the embarrassment and fatigue of sitting pregnant in class (only one of the girls in our study had taken advantage of IRC's current policy of allowing pregnant girls to attend school).⁶
- **These trends are general to the population surveyed, but slight differences in attitude between the two nationalities are evident.** While rural and urban refugees had essentially identical response patterns to our questions, a difference between Sierra Leonean and Liberian responses persisted throughout our survey. Sierra Leonean parents intimated less tolerance for a departure from tradition on their daughters' part than did Liberian parents, and Sierra Leonean female students seemed more firmly convinced that school was not the proper place for girls. This difference in the strength of the cultural barriers to girls' education suggests that IRC staff may have to work more thoroughly in the Sierra Leonean camps to acquire parental support for female education.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a partial list of measures IRC Guinea could implement to address the cultural, familial, and economic causes of female dropout.

A. To Improve Young Girls' Attitudes About Their Academic Capabilities:

1. *Implement a Gender Training Program for all IRC Primary School Teachers:*

Teachers at the early levels of primary school obviously play an important role in reinforcing their female students' academic confidence. IRC trainings have never addressed how a teacher's responses and attitudes convey subtle messages to female students about their right and ability to remain in class. IRC teaching personnel should be trained to avoid gender bias in the classroom, so that the school environment does not underscore young girls' beliefs that females are less intelligent than boys.

⁶ This policy was a subject of great debate among parents and students. Many disapproved of it, saying it would only make the teenage pregnancy rate increase because non-pubescent girls would assume from the presence of pregnant classmates that it would not be disadvantageous to them to become pregnant in the future.

2. Implement a “Young Scholars’ Program” for Girls in Early Primary Grades:

Girls in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades should have a chance to showcase their schoolwork and participate in academic competitions, which will demonstrate to them that they can succeed in school. Bi-semester exhibitions, contests, and games that would allow female early primary students to demonstrate their academic ability could help young girls feel more confident in an academic atmosphere.

3. Implement an “It’s Not Too Late” Campaign for Girls 13 and Older Who Are Not Currently Attending

Since girls most often make their own decisions to leave school, and then feel inadequate when they contemplate returning, they should be the target of some of IRC’s promotional activities. By organizing informal seminars, Young Women’s Social Club activities and camp presentations by older educated women for out-of-school early adolescents, IRC could spread the message that those who have dropped out from school would be very welcome to return.

B. To Increase Adults’ Involvement with their Daughters’ Education:

1. Implement “20-Minute-A-Day” Campaign:

Many parents do not feel they can inquire about their children’s work because they have not acquired a substantial amount of schooling themselves. Parents and other guardians of IRC female students should be encouraged to spend 20 minutes a day reading or learning about what their daughter studied that day. A system should be designed to award prizes to the daughter-parent pairs who achieve the greatest number of 20-minute sessions in a month.

2. Implement Daughter-Parent School Days:

Once a month, have a daughter bring one of her parents or guardians to school and have the pair present something to the class during the last period of the day. This could be a story, a song, a way of making handicrafts, a drama, etc. Once the children are dismissed, take 10 minutes for a teacher-parent conference to discuss the girls’ progress in school and discover whether she is getting much reinforcement at home.

3. Implement Female Education Campaigns in Areas of Extreme Decline in Female Enrollment:

In zones where female enrollment is particularly low or declines particularly rapidly, organize focus groups and student meetings to specify the main reasons for dropout within that zone and brainstorm ways to address them. Experiment in those settings with all-female classes, parent committees to increase female enrollment, and in-school dramas and debates on the theme of female education.

C. To Provide Academic Support for Girls Who Have No Adults Assisting Them:

1. Identify Female Primary Students Living Alone and Assist Them To Organize Study Groups:

Girls who have no one to help with their schoolwork should be encouraged to review their lessons with each other. IRC teachers can organize these review sessions once a week to enable these girls to keep up with their schoolwork.

2. Organize an Academic ‘Buddy System’ for Girls with Nobody to Check Their Work:

By pairing girls who live alone with a female student from the next class up, IRC teachers can provide single female students with someone whose responsibility it is to be sure they understand their lessons and complete their schoolwork on time.

3. Organize Once-A-Month EC Conferences with These Students

Once a month, girls who live on their own and continue in school should be invited to a central conference in their zone with the Education Coordinator for that area. The EC should collect

information on their academic progress; on the number of times they are meeting with their study groups, and whether they are receiving enough support from their mentors. If possible, the EC should organize some kind of academic activity for the day which could carry a monetary prize.

D. To Ease The Economic Burden School Poses for Girls:

1. Expand the Gueckedou Uniforms Project to Cover All IRC Zones:

Girls often refuse to come to school because they lack what they consider to be proper clothing and shoes. IRC Gueckedou recently experimented with a uniform distribution, which should, funding provided, be expanded throughout the IRC system.

2. Implement a Scholarship Program For the Most Needy and Academically Capable Girls:

Criteria should be established to select extremely poor and academically superior girls for a living allowance/scholarship. This would enable those who cannot survive without working full time to attend an IRC school.

3. Implement Income-Generation Workshops at School:

Most girls need to go directly from school to the market to sell baked bread or candy. If IRC could supply the basic ingredients and cooking space for girls to make these items after school, it would facilitate their commercial activities and increase their willingness to attend.

E. To Address Reproductive Health and Contraceptive Issues:

1. Start Contraceptive Education One Year Earlier:

IRC's contraceptive education program should be extended to all 3rd and 4th grade girls. They all should have a basic mastery of the facts of life before they reach the grades where they are most likely to get pregnant and drop out of school.

2. Revise the Contraceptive Education Curriculum for Upper Primary Grades:

Most 5th and 6th graders understand how women become pregnant and have heard about, if not used, condoms and tablets. However, IRC's health education curriculum for 5th and 6th graders should:

- incorporate information on irregular menstruation,
- de-emphasize the rhythm method as a successful form of contraception,
- focus on partner-partner communication about contraception rather than on the biological facts.

These steps will enable IRC female students to:

- more quickly recognize when they are pregnant (many confuse the spotting they experience at the beginning of a pregnancy with a light period),
- distinguish between useful and ineffective contraceptive practices,
- and c) discuss contraception more comfortably with their lovers.

3. Organize Young Men's Social Clubs

Boys and young men in the camps and IRC schools need a forum in which to discuss their own responsibilities in using contraception and impregnating school girls. Since IRC has had such success with the Young Women's Social Clubs, it would be wise to copy that model for adolescent boys in the camps and schools so that they can also focus upon difficult issues of sexuality and maturity with their peers.

4. Organize Reproductive Health Information and Communication Seminars with Camp Parents:

Few refugee parents feel comfortable discussing matters of reproduction, sexuality, and sexual relations with their daughters. This often results in daughters concealing their relationships from their parents, and misinterpreting what they learn in school about contraception.

5. Experiment with Separate Classes for Pregnant Students:

If there are enough students from a certain grade level, providing them separate instruction at their level in addition to pre-natal care information might be a more effective way to assist them in keeping up with school than allowing them to attend classes during regular school hours.

6. Initiate Cooperation with Other Agencies to Sanction any Worker Who Impregnates a Student:

Because they are among the most well-off in the camps, GTZ, IRC, MSF, and UNHCR personnel are often responsible for the pregnancies, which cause girls to leave the IRC schools. If all agencies enforced the same sanctions for personnel who caused schoolgirls to drop out, there might be a decrease in the frequency of agency-related births.