

## **SOCIAL BARRIERS TO FEMALE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRIVATE FORMAL SECTOR IN KENYA: CASE OF KAWANGWARE LOCATION IN NAIROBI COUNTY AND EAST KANYADA LOCATION IN HOMA-BAY COUNTY**

**Esther Awuor Owino, Joseph Ogutu Owino & Paul Amolloh Odundo**  
Department of Educational Communication and Technology  
University of Nairobi, KENYA

### **ABSTRACT**

Female youths in Kenya account for the majority of the unemployed citizens and mainly work in the informal sector. This situation has persisted over the years despite women increasingly becoming well educated. This study therefore investigated the social barriers to female youth employment in the private formal sector in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the characteristics of the targeted female youths in Kawangware and East Kanyada Location, and to analyze how the characteristics of the female youths constrain them from accessing formal employment in the private sector in Kenya. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to address its objectives. Quantitative data were collected using a survey questionnaire and qualitative data was collected using key informant interviews. The findings revealed that access to formal employment was a serious challenge to young women in Kenya. It further pointed out that many women had limited human capital skills, which hindered them from being competitive in the formal private sector of the labor market in Kenya. The study therefore recommends that the government should promote tertiary education for female youths to enable them access better employment opportunities in the private formal sector. The government should collaborate with the private sector in enhancing access to labor market information.

**Keywords:** Social-barriers, Youth, Employment.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Formal employment is recognized globally as an important mechanism for improving social and economic status of women (Corner, 2011). The labor market of Africa, however, has significant gender disparities, which hinder active participation of the female labor force. The female labor force in the formal sector in Kenya has remained below 30% for several years due to social, cultural and economic barriers (Wamuthenya, 2010). On the other hand, the male labor force dominates the formal sector (Suda, 2002). In 2011, for example, the employment-to-population ratio for young women in Kenya was 29.5%, which was lower than that of young men (36%) (Escudero & Mourelo, 2013). Additionally, the employment rate for young women in Kenya was 15% lower than in Sub-Saharan Africa (Escudero & Mourelo, 2013). According to Arbache, et al. (2010), lack of gender equality in access to economic opportunities hinders economic growth. Filipiak, (2010) noted that many African countries rank poorly in the global development index due to gender inequalities, especially in economic, education and health sectors. This study examined the social barriers to female youth employment in the private formal sector in Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ercan, et al. (2010) observed that childcare activities and domestic chores hinder women from participating actively in the labor market. They noted that some employers in Turkey were reluctant to employ women because of their fertility (Ercan, Hosgor, & Yilmaz, 2010). According to Fapohunda (2012), urbanization, migration and traditional family support systems have weakened the participation of women in the formal sector (Fapohunda, 2012). These studies have discussed how traditional norms and the family institution restrict women's participation in formal employment. However, they did not examine the extent to which reproductive work, domestic chores and traditional norms affected women in different age cohorts.

According to ILO (2012), early marriages and unplanned pregnancies restrict young women from accessing productive jobs in the formal sector. Whether married or unmarried, young women facing maternity may find themselves with additional tasks, which curtail their chances of earning a decent income. It was therefore important to establish the extent to which marital status and maternity affects young women's access to employment opportunities in Kenya.

Atieno (2006) avers that education is a key determinant of women's access to employment opportunities. She further asserts that investing in women's education at all levels contributes significantly to the overall socio-economic development through decreased fertility levels, improved child health and higher labor productivity. In similar vein, Maglad (1998) contend that education equips women with necessary skills required by employers. He however notes that education does not guarantee active participation of women in the formal sector because social and cultural practices could act as barriers. For instance, gender division of labor, reproduction and childcare hold back educated women from participating actively in formal employment.

Floro and Meurs (2009), contend that women's participation in formal employment has increased worldwide, but they are still segregated into certain types of employment. This is due to a complex mix of factors, such as household duties, educational background, gender discrimination, social norms, and personal choice (Floro & Meurs, 2009). They noted that patriarchy exacerbates the low rate of female labor force participation in the private formal sector.

### **Problem Statement**

According to the 2009 census, the youths in Kenya constituted 35.39% of the total population. The female population was slightly higher than the male population in all the youth age cohorts (Njonjo, 2010). Overall, the females constituted 51% while the males constituted 49% of the youth population (Njonjo, 2010; KNBS, 2009). The preceding data indicates that the youth comprise a significant proportion of those in the working age bracket in Kenya. Unfortunately, there is a high rate of unemployment particularly among young Kenyan women because economic growth has not been at par with population growth. Worse still, gender disparities in employment opportunities and economic investment patterns have continued to widen in different sectors and at various levels of development intervention over the years. This trend has aggravated the rate of unemployment among many Kenyan women. Currently, there is dearth of information on challenges that hinder Kenyan women from

accessing employment in formal private sector. This background inspired the study of the social barriers that hinder female youths from accessing formal employment in Kenya's private formal sector.

### **Overall Objective**

The overall objective of the study was to investigate the social barriers to female youth employment in Kenya's private formal sector.

### **The study was guided by the following specific objectives**

- I. Examine how marriage and childcare hinder female youths from accessing formal employment in the private sector.
- II. Analyze how education and work experience influence female youths' access to formal employment in the private sector.

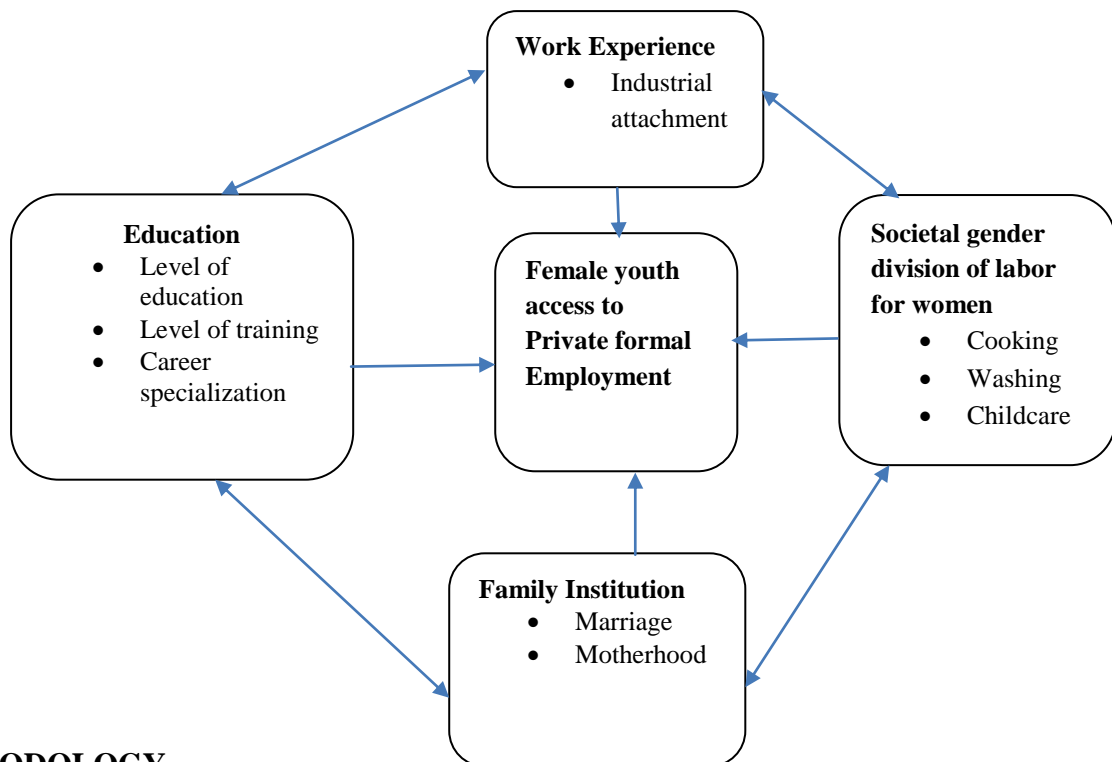
### **Theoretical Framework**

Feminist theory guided the study of the social barriers that impede female youths from accessing formal employment in the private sector. Feminism aims at promoting equality for men and women in political, economic and social spheres. Feminists believe that women are oppressed mainly because of their sex based on the dominant ideology of patriarchy in society (Sarikakis, Rush, Grubb-Swetnam, & Lane, 2008). The Marxist-socialist feminists argue that structural conditions and macro level processes that exploit one's labor are based usually on the gendered division of labor; hence, when combined with gender oppression, they constitute the basis of patriarchal capitalism. Marxist-socialist thought recognizes women's agency as laborers, activists and political agents of change, although within conditions not of their own making. Finally, feminist economists argue that gender inequality in the market place is structured into market forces by discriminatory practices inherited from the past, as well as by the bargaining power exercised in the present by powerful market actors pursuing their own self-interests (Kabeer, 2012). Therefore, gender disadvantage in the labor market is a product of these 'structures of constraints, which operate over the life course of men and women from different societies (Folbre, 1994). The different feminists' perspectives discussed in this section guided the study on the barriers to female youth employment in the private formal sector.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The reviewed literature identified a number of social factors that influence women's participation in formal and informal sectors of the economy. The social factors include education/training, maternity, marital status and domestic chores. The conceptual framework in figure 1 illustrates how the independent variables (education, marital status/number of children, and work experience) interact to influence the dependent variable (access to formal employment in private formal sector).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



## METHODOLOGY

### Description of the Study Sites

The study was situated in Kawangware location in Nairobi County and East Kanyada location in Homa-Bay County. Kawangware is mainly an urban area with a population density of 29,092 and covers 3.9 Sq. Km (KNBS, 2009). Part of the area is characterized by informal settlements whose inhabitants are mainly low-income earners. By contrast, East Kanyada location is a rural area located in Homa-Bay County. It covers 104.1 Sq. Km and has a population density of 364 (KNBS, 2009). Farming and small-scale retail businesses are the main economic activities in the area.

### Population and Sample Size

The study population consisted of female youths aged between 18 and 35 years in Kawangware and East Kanyada locations. The unit of analysis was the individual female youth. Kawangware location has two Sub locations namely Gatina and Kawangware. East Kanyada has four Sub locations namely Kothidha, Kanyach-Kachar, Kalanya-Kanyango and Kobwola-Kogwang. Table 1 provides a summary of the population distribution in the areas of study.

**Table 1: Population distribution in Kawangware and East Kanyada**

Kawangware Location			East Kanyada Location		
Sub-Location	Male Population	Female Population	Sub-Location	Male Population	Female Population
Gatina	24,747	21,125	Kothidha	4,200	4,702
Kawangware	34,683	32,731	Kanyach-Kachar	3,609	4,129
			Kalanya-Kanyango	6,965	7,562
			Kobwola-Kogwang	3,204	3,529
Total	59,430	53,856		17,978	19,922

Source: 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census Report Vol 1A

The study employed proportionate sampling technique to ensure the sample for each location is proportionate to the entire population. The two locations were sampled purposively due to their demographic and socio-economic set-up, which proved useful in providing adequate respondents and data. Proportionate sampling technique was used to determine a sample size of 150. Table 2 and 3 provide proportional samples for each location and sub-location respectively.

**The sample for each Location was derived by:**

Sample for Kawangware =  $\frac{\text{Total Population of females in Kawangware Location}}{\text{Total population of females in Kawangware + East Kanyada Locations}} \times 150$

Total population of females in Kawangware + East Kanyada Locations

Sample for East Kanyada =  $\frac{\text{Total Population of females in East Kanyada Location}}{\text{Total population of females in Kawangware + East Kanyada Locations}} \times 150$

Total population of females in Kawangware + East Kanyada Locations

**Table 2: Proportional Sample for each Location**

Location	Total Female Population	Proportional Sample Per Location
Kawangware	53,856	109
East Kanyada	19,922	41
Total	73,778	150

Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Census Report, 2009.

**Table 3: Proportional Sample for each Sub-Location**

Kawangware Location			East Kanyada Location		
Sub-Location	Female Population	Proportional Sample	Sub-Location	Female Population	Proportional Sample
Gatina	21,125	43	Kothidha	4,702	10
Kawangware	32,731	66	Kanyach-Kachar	4,129	8
			Kalanya-Kanyango	7,562	16
			Kobwola-Kogwang	3,529	7
Total	53,856	109		19,922	41

Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Census Report, 2009.

## Sampling of Respondents

One hundred and fifty female youths were sampled and interviewed. They were sampled from all labor market categories. The researcher identified the first respondent using simple random sampling and applied systematic sampling for subsequent respondents. For the unemployed category, the researcher used convenience-sampling technique because they could not be accessed easily from the enterprises or institutions in the area. Ten key informants were sampled for the study using purposive sampling technique. The key informants were sampled based on their expert knowledge about employment issues.

## Data Collection Methods

The study adopted qualitative and quantitative research methods to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases of using a single method and to attain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The qualitative data collection technique entailed key informant interviews using a key informant guide with semi-structured questions. Quantitative data was collected using a survey questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was cleaned to eliminate inconsistencies and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) techniques, such as descriptive statistics, measures of central tendencies, frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically according to their patterns and trends and grouped into categories.

## STUDY FINDINGS

### Distribution of Sample across Market Categories

The respondents were drawn from various sectors of the labor market. According to the findings presented in table 4, majority of the respondents 56(37.3%) were unemployed. Most of the employed female youths 51(24%) worked in the informal sector, followed by formal private sector 21(14%). The formal public sector had the least number of female youth employees 12(8%). These findings are consistent with those of other studies. According to Wamuthenya (2010), many female youths in rural and urban areas are unemployed and the few employed ones mainly work in the informal sector of the economy. She avers that this situation is due to social barriers and gender inequalities in the labor market.

**Table 4: Distribution of Sample across Market Categories**

Market Category	Frequency	Percent %
Formal Public	12	8
Formal Private	21	14
Informal Sector	51	24
Unpaid family work	10	6.7
Unemployed	56	37.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Data, 2015

### Age of Respondents

The study targeted female youths aged 18 to 35 years. According to the findings presented in table 5, the minimum age of the respondents was 18 years and the maximum was 35 years. The mean age of the respondents was 24.3 years. Majority of the sampled female youths 78(52%) were aged between 21 and 26 years and only a few 23(15.3%) were in the age bracket of 30-35 years as presented in Table 5. This finding means that most of the respondents were in their formative stages of employment and had not gathered much work experience.

**Table 5: Distribution of the sample by age**

Age categories in years	Frequency	Percent %
18-20	32	21.3
21-23	42	28.0
24-26	36	24.0
27-29	17	11.3
30-32	12	8.0
33-35	11	7.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Data, 2015

### Distribution of Age by Market Category

The distribution of the respondents' age by market category indicated that the lower age cohorts were mainly composed of those in the informal sector, unpaid family work, formal private and the unemployed category. Majority of the unemployed respondents were in the age bracket of 18-23 years, but joblessness eased with increase in age. In contrast, those employed in formal public sector were mainly in the age bracket of 24-35 as indicated in Table 6. This finding suggests that the youth in the higher age cohorts had more occupational experience and more years of training than those in the lower age brackets. Thus, they were better placed to secure jobs in the formal public and private sectors.

**Table 6: Distribution of Age by Market Category**

Market Category	Age Category						Total
	18-20	21-23	24-26	27-29	30-32	33-35	
Formal Public	0	0	4	2	2	4	12
Formal Private	1	8	5	4	3	0	21
Informal Sector	9	10	16	4	6	6	51
Unpaid family work	2	4	4	0	0	0	10
Unemployed	20	20	7	7	1	1	56
Total	32	42	36	17	12	11	150

### Marital status

Out of the 150 sampled female youths 77(51.3%) were married, 69(46%) were single, 3(2%) were divorced/separated and 1(0.7%) were widowed. Analysis of the respondents' marital status according to market categories showed that most of the unemployed respondents were single. However, majority of female workers employed in various market categories were



married as shown in Table 7. This finding indicates that marriage did not hinder female youths from accessing employment.

**Table 7: Marital Status as per Market Category**

Market Category	Marital Status				Total
	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced/ Separated	
Formal Government	2	9	1	0	12
Formal Private	10	10	0	1	21
Informal Sector	22	27	0	2	28
Unpaid family work	3	7	0	0	10
Unemployed	32	24	0	0	56
Total	69	77	1	3	150

Source: Field Data, 2015

### Market category and Presence of Children

Childcare and domestic chores have been identified as deterrents to women's participation in market activities (Fapohunda, 2012). This study therefore sought to investigate how childcare influenced female youths' access to formal employment. The results showed that childcare did not significantly discourage women's participation in employment since there were more respondents who were employed and had children as opposed to their counterparts who were unemployed. However, the findings revealed that presence of children seemed to affect the choice of employment sector. For example, cross-tabulation was run between presence of children by market category and the results indicated that majority of the employed respondents who had children were engaged in informal employment as shown in Table 8. Chi-Square test results helped to ascertain whether there was a significant relationship between presence of children and market category. The Pearson Chi-Square value was 11.812<sup>a</sup> with an associated significance level of 0.019, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. This means that there was a significant relationship between the two variables (presence of children and market category).

Therefore, the phenomenon of having more women in the informal sector may be attributed to the fact that informal sector employment tend to have more flexible terms and conditions of employment than formal employment. Thus, it attracts a number of young women who are parents. The fact that majority of female youths who had children were employed in the informal sector also implies that motherhood deterred them from advancing their education. Consequently, poor education as result of early motherhood hindered many female youths from accessing jobs in the formal market. This argument is supported by the fact that only 20 out of the 92 female youths with children were employed in the formal public and private sectors. When asked to comment on whether motherhood had an influence on access to employment, one of the respondents in Kawangware commented:

*I dropped out of secondary school due to unplanned motherhood and I never had a chance to complete my studies. Since I do not have academic papers, I am unable to access formal employment. I therefore survive on short-term labor contracts in the informal sector in Kawangware town.*



**Table 8: Market category and Presence of Children**

Market Category	Presence of Children		Total
	Yes	No	
Formal Public	8	4	12
Formal Private	12	9	21
Informal Sector	35	16	28
Unpaid family work	10	0	10
Unemployed	27	29	56
Total	92	58	150

Chi-Square=11.812<sup>a</sup> Sig level. 0.19

Source: Field Data, 2015

**Education****Education Level in Each Market Category**

Analysis of the respondents' education level across the market categories revealed that majority of those who were employed in the formal sector had more than twelve years of learning as opposed to those employed in the informal sector and unpaid family work as shown in Table 9. This means that those who were working in the formal employment had acquired some form of training after secondary education, which is an indication that postsecondary education increased the probabilities of one being employed in the formal public or private sectors. As observed in Table 10, majority of the respondents (31) who were working in the formal employment had attained 13 years and above of schooling contrary to respondents in the informal sector, who mainly had below 12 years of education. These findings confirm previous studies (Buchmann et.al 2010; UNDP, 2013; Fapohunda, 2012; Zapeda et.al 2012) on women employment, which have shown that highly educated women are more likely to be employed in the formal sector compared to those with poor education.

**Table 9: Education Level and Market Category**

Years of Schooling	Market Category					Total
	Formal public	Formal private	Informal sector	Unpaid family work	Unemployed	
0	0	0	0	1	0	1
7	0	0	1	1	2	4
8	0	1	8	5	7	21
9	0	0	0	0	2	2
10	0	0	3	0	3	6
11	0	0	3	0	7	10
12	0	1	17	2	15	35
13	0	6	11	0	7	24
14	9	4	3	1	7	24
15	1	5	4	0	4	14
16	1	4	1	0	2	8
18	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	12	21	51	10	56	150

Source: Field Data, 2015

**Presence and Training by Market Category**

Analysis of training by market category showed that all the respondents in formal employment (public and private) had been trained. Majority (54.9%) of those who were employed in the informal sector also indicated that they had some training though there was a considerable number (45.1%) that had not acquired any training. However, most of the unpaid family workers (80%) and the unemployed had not acquired any form of training as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Presence of Training by Market Category**

Market Category	Presence of Training		Total
	Yes	No	
Formal public	12 100.0%	0 0.0%	12 100.0%
Formal private	21 100.0%	0 0.0%	21 100.0%
Informal sector	28 54.9%	23 45.1%	51 100.0%
Unpaid family work	2 20.0%	8 80.0%	10 100.0%
Unemployed	22 39.3%	34 60.7%	56 100.0%
Total	85 56.7%	65 43.3%	150 100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2015

**Type of Training by Market Category**

Results of respondents' type of training by market category showed that majority in formal employment (public and private) and the unemployed had certificate and diploma training. Those in the unpaid family work and informal employment had respondents whom majority had certificate and apprenticeship training. Very few respondents across the market categories had acquired a university degree.

**Table 11: Type of Training by Market Category**

Type of Training	Market Category					Total
	Formal public	Formal private	Informal sector	Unpaid family work	Unemployed	
Vocational training	0	3	4	0	3	10
Certificate training	8	9	8	1	13	39
Diploma	3	7	4	0	4	18
University Degree	1	2	2	0	0	5
Apprenticeship	0	0	10	1	2	13
Total	12	21	28	2	22	85

Source: Field Data, 2015

## Field of Training

The study also investigated the fields under which the respondents had been trained. The results in table 13 showed that majority of the respondents (17.6%) had been trained in Commerce/Business Administration. Other fields that also registered a considerable number of respondents were Education (15.3%), Hair Dressing/Beauty Therapy (15.3%), Computer training/I.T (12.9%), as well as Tailoring and Dressmaking. A few of the respondents had been trained in Arts/Humanities (3.5%), Health Science/Medicine (7.1%), Catering/Hospitality/Hotel Management (9.4%), Science (1.2) and Industry/Technical (2.4%). Majority (66.7%) of respondents employed in the formal public sector had been trained in education, formal private sector had more respondents with training in education (14.3%), computer training (14.3%) and commerce/business administration (23.8%), and majority (39.3%) in the informal sector had been trained in hair dressing/beauty therapy. The unemployed category had more respondents who had been trained in commerce/business administration (31.8%) and computer training (22.7%). Among the respondents who had training, eighteen (21.2%) of them indicated having additional training to their major area of training. 44.4% of them stated that they had undertaken computer courses as an additional training. Others had been trained in Commerce and Business Administration, Hospitality and Hotel management, Hair dressing/Beauty therapy among others. The respondents provided various reasons for acquiring additional training. 38.9% indicated that they acquired additional training in order to be more knowledgeable while 33.3% wanted to have more qualifications and be competitive in the job market. Some respondents also explained that they trained in other domains because of personal interest.

**Table 12: Field of Training by Market Category**

Field of Training	Market Category					Total
	Formal public	Formal private	Informal sector	Unpaid family work	Unemployed	
Science	0	0	1	0	0	1
Arts/Humanities	1	2	0	0	0	3
Commerce/Business administration	1	5	2	0	7	15
Industry/technical	0	1	1	0	0	2
Education	8	3	1	1	0	13
Health sciences/medicine	2	2	0	0	2	6
Catering/Hospitality	0	2	3	0	3	8
Computer training/I.T	0	3	3	0	5	11
Hair Dressing & Beauty therapy	0	0	11	0	2	13
Tailoring and Dressmaking	0	1	5	1	2	9
Travel and Tourism	0	1	0	0	1	2
Social sciences	0	1	0	0	0	1
Others	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	12	21	28	2	22	85

Source: Field Data, 2015

## **Years of Experience**

Respondents' years of experience was investigated in order to gain more understanding about their human capital level. The maximum year of experience was 13 years whereas the minimum was 0 years. The mean years of experience was 2.16 years, which was slightly different from the mean years of experience related to the respondents' major area of training (2.12 years). Analysis of the distribution of years of experience for each age category of the respondents showed that those with the minimum years of experience (0 years) were mostly in the age bracket of 18-23 years. This can be attributed to the fact that respondents in this age category had only completed secondary education and some were still advancing their education; hence, they had not gained work experience. Respondents who indicated that they had more than one year of work experience were in the age bracket of 24-29 years.

Experience workers are more likely to secure better employment opportunities than fresh job seekers are (Negatu, 1993). Most employers seek to hire employees with elaborate occupational experience and high academic qualifications. For example, the private sector employers interviewed reported that they often hired employees with relevant work experience. KI1 further explained that most private sector employers in Kenya like hiring recruits with practical skills. This study examined the respondents' human capital in terms of years of experience and the results showed that the mean years of experience was 2.16 years. These results indicate that the respondents had some experience, which is lower compared to the years required by most employers as noted by KI 1 who further emphasized that most female youths lacked relevant and adequate experience, which limited their access job opportunities to the private formal sector.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study findings pointed out that social barriers hindered female youths from accessing employment in the formal private sector. As discussed in the study, lack of education and inadequate professional training hindered many female youths' from accessing formal employment because most of the private sector employers liked hiring highly qualified professionals. Work experience also had a significant influence on female youths' access to employment in the formal private sector. Unfortunately, majority of the female youths could not access employment in the formal sector due to lack of relevant occupational experience even if they had good academic qualifications. Parenthood had the least direct influence on female youths' ability to secure employment. However, unplanned or early motherhood disrupted many female youths from completing their studies; hence, they lacked requisite academic training for formal employment in the formal private sector.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, the study proposes the following general recommendations.

- I. The government should promote tertiary education among female youths in Kenya by providing bursaries to needy female youths.
- II. The government should collaborate with the private sector in creating programs aimed at enhancing access to labor market information, career guidance and counseling.
- III. There should be gender mainstreaming in all labor policies in Kenya to enable women have equal access to employment opportunities.

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