



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



SCHOOLING AND GIRLS' SCHOOL DROPOUT IN SAKÉTÉ: WHAT SOLUTIONS FOR GIRLS' SOCIAL INTEGRATION?

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ABSTRACT

Girls' school dropout remains a critical issue of educational equity and human development. This study, conducted in the municipality of Sakété (Benin), identifies the causes, explanatory factors, and social implications of female school dropout. A mixed-methods approach combined a quantitative survey of 285 respondents (120 girls aged 10–24, 120 parents or guardians, and 45 key stakeholders) with focus group discussions and life history narratives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a structured questionnaire. Local perceptions were analysed using two ethnometric indices, the Relative Frequency of Citation (RFC) and the Informant Consensus Factor (ICF); a chi-square test assessed the association between school level and dropout, and a binary logistic regression identified explanatory factors. Results show that most dropouts occurred at the secondary level (51.38% lower secondary; 33.33% upper secondary), with a significant association between school level and dropout ($\chi^2 = 12.59$; $p = 0.0018$). The most frequently cited causes were economic hardship, preference for boys' education, and reproductive factors (RFC > 0.6; ICF > 0.95). School distance (OR = 1.26), male children in the household (OR = 2.22), and early pregnancy (OR = 1.96) significantly increased dropout risk, whereas a household head with secondary education (OR = 0.22) and married status (OR = 0.14) were protective. These findings call for integrated, multisectoral policies combining economic support, improved school infrastructure, psychosocial assistance, and community awareness to strengthen girls' school retention.

Keywords: School dropout; Adolescent girls; Sakété; Ethnometric indices; Logistic regression

1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental lever of human and social development, central to building human capital, reducing socioeconomic inequalities, and promoting collective progress [1-4]. Sustainable development is illusory without equitable, inclusive, quality access to education for all. Since the 1990 Jomtien World Conference launched the "Education for All" initiative, numerous policies have sought to democratize access to basic education internationally. Yet gender equality in education remains an unfinished goal, particularly in the Global South, where girls continue to face multifaceted, persistent obstacles.

Globally, school dropout premature withdrawal from education without at least a minimal qualification, generally an upper secondary diploma is a major challenge with profound repercussions for individual and social trajectories [3,5-

8]. In sub-Saharan Africa, despite progress since 2008, the pace remains insufficient to reach universal schooling by 2030 [9]: of the 59 million out-of-school children worldwide, more than half live in this region, where nearly 20% of children are unenrolled and 34% drop out before completing primary school [10]. This phenomenon disproportionately affects girls, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, compromising their future and perpetuating structural and intergenerational inequalities [11].

Girls' education is strategic for development: it helps break cycles of poverty, improve community health, regulate fertility, and foster women's empowerment [12], while increasing economic opportunities and improving household living conditions and the educational success of future generations [13,14]. As Coombs [15] noted, educating a girl means acting simultaneously on health, nutrition, hygiene, fertility, innovation, and the transmission of values — a structuring lever for the Sustainable Development Goals, notably SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5 (gender equality) [16].

Yet obstacles to girls' full schooling remain numerous sociocultural constraints, economic precarity, early marriage, inadequate infrastructure, gender-based violence, discriminatory norms [17,18] with the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2012) estimating 24 million school-age girls out of school and 12.7% dropping out prematurely, findings still relevant across many African contexts today.

Benin, like other West African countries, has pursued reforms to improve access to education: the 1990 Constitution enshrines the right to education for all, the 2004 National Action Plan for Education for All emphasized girls' education in rural areas, and the 2005 Essential Education Package followed by free tuition in 2006 raised enrolment through measures such as school canteens and educational kits [19]. Despite these efforts, structural challenges persist, with national data showing growing difficulties in retention, transition between cycles, and completion, particularly among girls [20,21] trends also observed locally.

The municipality (commune) of Sakété, located in the Plateau department, illustrates these challenges. Although it benefits from the infrastructure and educational policies implemented at the national level, girls' school dropout remains a matter of concern there. Yet the local specificities of this issue in terms of causes, forms, magnitude, and impacts remain poorly documented in the literature.

This raises a central question: what are the explanatory factors behind girls' school dropout in Sakété, and how can appropriate approaches be implemented to facilitate their social and occupational integration?

The present study adopts an approach that is both analytical and civic in nature. It aims to contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of girls' school dropout in Sakété while formulating concrete courses of action. Drawing on the values of territorial solidarity, collective responsibility, and social justice, it seeks to promote an inclusive educational culture that safeguards girls' fulfilment, family progress, and sustainable local development.

The main objective of this study is to analyse the causes and consequences of girls' school dropout in Sakété, while proposing concrete courses of action to promote their sustainable social integration. Specifically, the study sought to: (i) analyse the school trajectories and dropout factors among girls in Sakété; (ii) trace their social pathways after leaving school and assess the resulting impacts; (iii) propose education and social integration projects tailored to the local context (so-called “terroir” or local-based projects), in order to promote their empowerment and reintegration.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Study area

Located in the Plateau department in south-eastern Benin, the municipality of Sakété covers 432 km², between 6°44'10"–6°44'11" N and 2°39'29"–2°39'31" E (Figure 1). It is bordered by Adja-Ouère (north), Avrankou and Missérété (south), the Nigerian border and Ifangni (east), and Adjohoun and Bonou (west), and is divided into six arrondissements (Aguidi, Ita-Djèbou, Sakété I, Sakété II, Takon, and Yoko) comprising about 81 villages or urban districts [22].

According to the 2013 General Population and Housing Census [22], Sakété has 114,088 inhabitants (~52.8% women; density ~264/km²), composed mainly of Nago-Yoruba (~72%) and Fon/Goun communities (~26%). The average age is 18.3 years (19.8 for women), reflecting a high proportion of girls and adolescent females [22,23].

The local economy relies mainly on agriculture (oil-palm and cocoa cultivation, food crops, livestock, fishing), with wetland zones and a classified forest (~60 ha) crossed by the Aguidi River. The climate is subequatorial with Sudano-

Guinean influences, with two rainy seasons (April–July, September–November) and two dry seasons; temperatures range from 28°C to 32°C and average annual rainfall is 1,100–1,200 mm (Météo-Bénin, unpublished data).

Its border location, connectivity to Benin's major urban centres, and sociocultural and territorial characteristics make Sakété a relevant site for analysing the determinants of girls' school dropout from both a local and representative perspective.

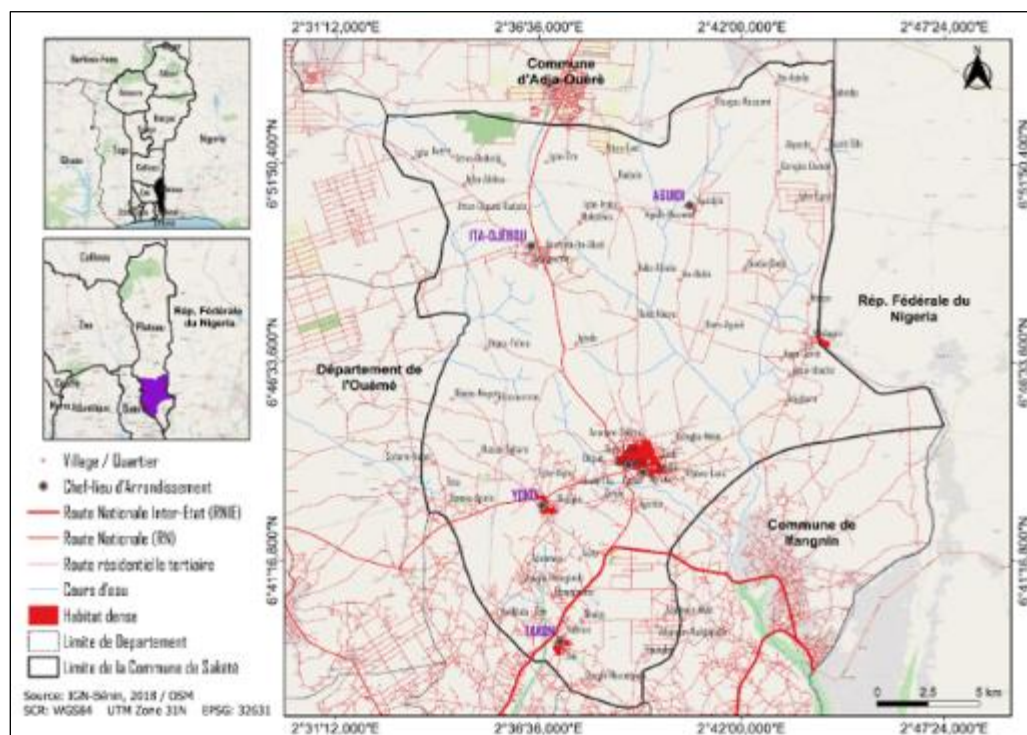


Figure 1: Geographic location of the Municipality of Sakété

2.2 Sample size determination

A preliminary survey was conducted across the six arrondissements of Sakété (Takou, Itadjebou, Aguidi, Sakété 1, Sakété 2, Yoko), selected to reflect the territory's main sociocultural and geographic disparities, to estimate the proportion (p) of respondents with direct or indirect knowledge of the schooling situation of girls in their household or environment. Thirty people were randomly selected and interviewed with a structured questionnaire identifying school-age girls in households and their educational status (in school, out of school, or never enrolled).

This exploratory survey estimated p at 0.63 (63% answered positively to “Do you have, or know of, school-age girls in your household who are currently in school or out of school?”). The required sample size (n) for the main survey was then calculated using Dagnelie's [25] formula for estimating a proportion in a finite population:

$$n = [U_{1-\alpha/2}]^2 \times p(1 - p) / d^2 \quad (1)$$

where $U_{1-\alpha/2}$ is the standard normal deviate for the chosen confidence level, p is the estimated proportion (0.63), and d is the margin of error, fixed at 5.6%.

Applying formula (1), the required sample size was estimated at approximately 285 people. This sample was then distributed proportionally across the six arrondissements of the study area, based on the relative size of their respective populations.

2.3 Data collection

2.3.1 Type of data and target population

A mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) was adopted to cross-reference data from different sources and gain an in-depth understanding of the causes, consequences, and integration prospects linked to girls' school dropout in Sakété. Data were collected from: girls aged 10 to 24 [24] (in school, out of school, or never enrolled); parents or legal guardians (family dynamics, socioeconomic constraints); teachers, head teachers/principals, and parent-

teacher association members; and community leaders and local authorities (village chiefs, elected officials, social affairs personnel).

2.3.2 Data collection methods and tools

Two main methods were used for data collection: the questionnaire survey (quantitative) and qualitative interview and discussion techniques.

2.3.3 Structured questionnaire survey

A closed-ended questionnaire was administered face-to-face to respondents (girls and household heads), in French or the local language, covering: sociodemographic characteristics (age, education, household size, economic situation); school trajectory (age of entry, interruptions, causes of dropout — pregnancy, early marriage, distance, cost, violence); perceptions of schooling (usefulness, aspirations, family support); and post-dropout pathways (daily activities, employment, marriage, outlook on the future). Data were collected using KoboCollect on tablets or smartphones to facilitate data entry, real-time quality control, and household geolocation.

2.3.4 Semi-structured interviews

In-depth individual interviews were conducted with out-of-school girls, parents, teachers, and local elected officials, gathering life stories that shed light on personal trajectories and structural constraints. Topics covered perceptions of social norms relating to girls' schooling, the mechanisms of school dropout, its consequences (social exclusion, marginalization, economic dependency), and preferred avenues for integration.

2.3.5 Focus groups (group discussions)

Focus group discussions (6 to 10 participants each) were organized with out-of-school girls and their in-school peers to explore cross-cutting perceptions of schooling, dropout, and future prospects. These sessions were also used to test the social acceptability of various integration proposals (vocational training, academic support, local women's entrepreneurship, etc.).

2.4 Data analysis

Data analysis followed a mixed-methods approach combining descriptive statistical tools, explanatory models, and ethnometric indicators, in order to understand the causes of girls' school dropout, their social pathways and associated consequences, as well as to identify major vulnerability factors and formulate appropriate social integration proposals.

2.4.1 Descriptive statistics

Questionnaire data were first processed using descriptive statistics to summarize the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents and of the girls concerned. Quantitative variables were analysed by calculating means, 95% confidence intervals (CI), medians, and standard deviations, while qualitative variables were examined through absolute and relative frequencies. Simple cross-tabulations were carried out between key variables (level of education attained, socioeconomic status, stated causes of dropout) to identify typical profiles.

2.4.2 Ethnometric analysis

Local knowledge regarding the causes of girls' school dropout was analysed using two complementary ethnometric indicators:

2.4.3 The Relative Frequency of Citation (RFC)

Proposed by Tardío and Pardo-de-Santayana [26], the RFC index is used in this study to assess the perceived importance of a specific cause through the proportion of respondents who mentioned it. It is calculated using the formula:

$$RFC = \frac{F_c}{N} \quad (2)$$

where F_c is the number of respondents who cited the cause in question, and N is the total number of respondents. Causes with a high RFC (close to 1) are considered priority causes in collective perception.

2.4.4 The Informant Consensus Factor (ICF)

This index was used to measure the level of agreement among informants on causes grouped by thematic category [27,28] (economic constraints, sociocultural norms, pregnancy/early marriage, school conditions). The ICF is calculated using the formula:

$$ICF = \frac{N_{uc} - N_t}{N_{uc} - 1} \quad (3)$$

where Nuc is the total number of citations in the category and Nt is the number of distinct items (e.g., unique causes cited). An ICF close to 1 indicates strong consensus within a category, whereas a low value reflects a diversity of opinions.

2.4.5 Multivariate analysis

To identify the explanatory factors associated with girls dropping out of school, a binary logistic regression was applied. This method models the probability of occurrence of a binary event here, the girl's schooling status, coded 1 if she is out of school and 0 if she is still enrolled as a function of a set of explanatory variables.

The model incorporates continuous quantitative explanatory variables (monthly household income in FCFA, number of children in the household, distance between home and school in kilometres), binary variables (early pregnancy, early marriage, presence of male children in the household, presence of school infrastructure), and nominal categorical variables, which were converted into indicator (dummy) variables for the analysis (household head's level of education, occupation, and religion, and marital status). For each categorical variable, one category was retained as the reference category.

Estimation was performed using the maximum likelihood method. Estimated coefficients (logits) were converted into odds ratios (OR) to facilitate the interpretation of effects. The overall fit of the model was assessed using the Wald statistic and the p-values associated with each predictor, with a significance threshold set at 5%. The analyses were conducted using R software [29], using functions from the stats package for estimation and broom for extracting and formatting results.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-educational profile of the surveyed girls

Table 1 presents the socio-educational indicators of the surveyed girls, showing diverse and often disrupted educational, social, and family trajectories. While 68.33% had reached secondary level (95% CI: [58.34–78.32%]), reflecting encouraging but insufficient access, 53.21% dropped out between ages 12 and 16 (95% CI: [43.00–63.42%]), a pivotal period marked by social, economic, or family pressures. Only 33.94% (95% CI: [23.22–44.66%]) are currently in school against 66.06% (95% CI: [55.88–76.24%]) out of school, and 9.16% (95% CI: [2.96–15.36%]) never enrolled at all, indicating exclusion from the very start of the educational pathway. Most respondents (62.1%) are single with no children, 24.3% are married or in a consensual union, and 13.6% are single or separated mothers — situations that can add obstacles or extra responsibilities affecting school continuity. Regarding occupation, 38.2% engage in informal economic activity (often petty trade), 26.7% are occupied full-time with domestic chores, and 21.5% are inactive or unemployed, indicating substantial economic and social vulnerability. Only 18.9% of out-of-school girls report having received support before leaving school, raising questions about the reach of dropout-prevention mechanisms.

Table 1: Socio-educational profile of the surveyed girls

Indicators	Frequency (%)	95% CI
Access to secondary school (collège)	68.33	[58.34–78.32]
Dropout between ages 12 and 16	53.21	[43.00–63.42]
Currently in school	33.94	[23.22–44.66]
Out of school	66.06	[55.88–76.24]
Never enrolled	9.16	[2.96–15.36]
Single, no children	62.1	[51.71–72.49]

Married / in a consensual union	24.3	[15.11–33.49]
Single or separated mother	13.6	[6.30–20.90]
Informal economic activity	38.2	[27.76–48.64]
Full-time domestic work	26.7	[17.21–36.19]
Inactive / unemployed	21.5	[12.65–30.35]
Received support before dropping out	18.9	[10.45–27.35]

Source: Field survey, 2025

Analysis of dropout status by school level (Table 2) reveals specific vulnerabilities: most dropouts came from lower and upper secondary levels (51.38% and 33.33% of the total, respectively), against a sample composition of 24.77% primary, 49.54% lower secondary, and 25.69% upper secondary students. The chi-square test confirms a strong association between school level and dropout ($\chi^2 = 12.59$; $p = 0.0018$).

Table 2: School status (dropout / non-dropout) by school level

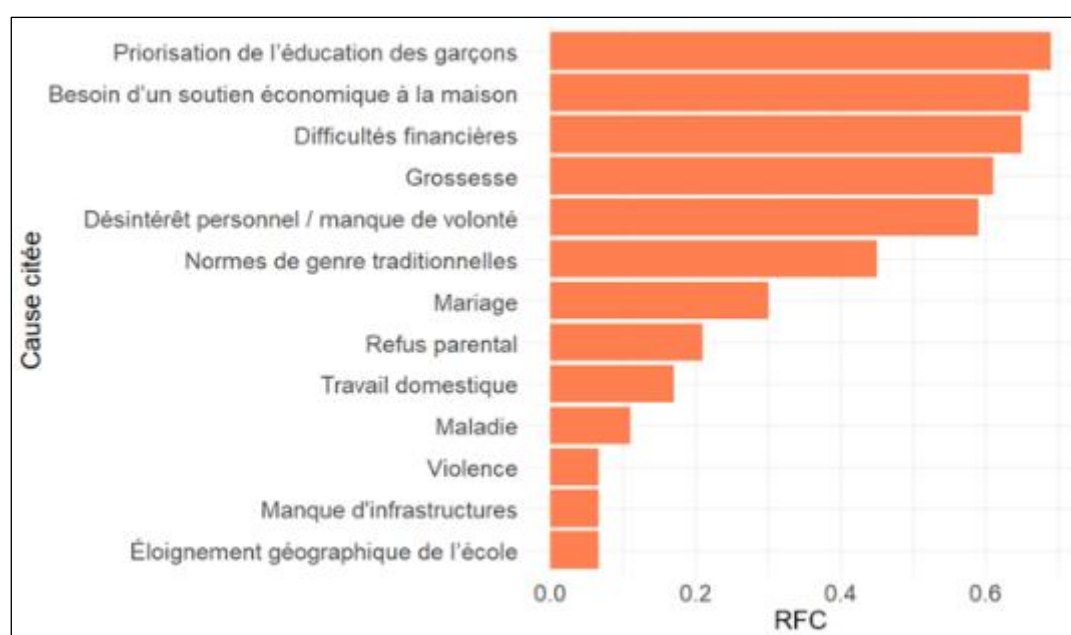
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Total
Dropout	11	37	24	72
Non-dropout	16	17	4	37
Proportion (%)	24.77	49.54	25.69	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

3.2 Local perceptions of the causes of girls' school dropout

3.2.1 Local importance of the causes of girls' school dropout

The Relative Frequency of Citation (RFC) of the causes of girls' school dropout reveals a clear hierarchy of factors (Figure 2). Prioritization of boys' education is the most frequently cited cause (RFC = 0.69), closely followed by economic causes — the need for support at home (RFC = 0.66) and financial hardship (RFC = 0.65). Pregnancy (RFC = 0.61), personal disinterest (RFC = 0.59), and academic failure (RFC = 0.51) are also regularly mentioned. Traditional gender norms, marriage, parental refusal, domestic work, and illness are cited less frequently (RFC 0.11–0.45) but remain contributing factors.

**Figure 2: Local perception of the causes of girls' school dropout**

3.2.2 Degree of informant consensus on the causes of girls' school dropout

The Informant Consensus Factor (ICF) shows a high level of agreement among respondents on the causes of girls' school dropout across thematic categories (Table 3), ranging from 0.93 to 1. The individual factors category shows total consensus (ICF = 1) on personal disinterest as a leading cause, while the economic, health/reproduction, and sociocultural categories also show high consensus (0.99, 0.98, and 0.97, respectively), confirming shared recognition that financial hardship, pregnancy and illness, and sociocultural norms and practices early marriage, parental refusal, prioritization of boys' education are major determinants of dropout. Even the school-conditions category, with the lowest ICF (0.93), well exceeds the 0.5 threshold usually taken to indicate significant consensus, confirming that geographic remoteness, violence or harassment, and lack of infrastructure are unanimously recognized as major barriers to girls' schooling.

Table 3: Informant consensus (ICF) on categories of causes of girls' school dropout

Category	Cause	Nuc	Nt	ICF
Individual factors	Personal disinterest / lack of motivation / academic failure	18	1	1
Economic	Need for economic support at home / financial hardship	76	2	0.99
Health/Reproduction	Pregnancy / illness	61	2	0.98
Sociocultural	Parental refusal / marriage / prioritization of boys' education in poor households	64	3	0.97
School conditions	Geographic remoteness of school / violence-harassment / lack of infrastructure	45	4	0.93

Source: Field survey, 2025

3.3 Explanatory factors of school dropout among girls

The binary logistic regression identifies several variables significantly associated with girls' dropout risk, with differentiated effects (Table 4, Figure 3). Distance between home and school is positively associated with dropout ($p = 0.009$; OR = 1.26): each additional kilometre increases dropout probability by 26%. The presence of male children in the household ($p = 0.011$; OR = 2.22) roughly doubles the risk, reflecting a gendered hierarchy in educational choices, and early pregnancy ($p = 0.019$; OR = 1.96) nearly doubles it as well. Conversely, a secondary level of education in the household head ($p = 0.023$; OR = 0.22) and being married ($p = 0.011$; OR = 0.14) are strongly protective. Monthly household income shows a modest but significant protective effect ($p = 0.012$; OR ≈ 1), and early marriage is weakly but significantly associated with a lower schooling probability ($p = 0.049$; OR = 0.97). The household head's gender (OR = 0.42), occupation, and religion, and the presence of school infrastructure (OR = 0.83), show no significant association with girls' schooling status ($p > 0.05$), suggesting indirect or mediated effects.

Table 4: Results of the binary logistic regression on the determinants of school dropout among girls in the study context

Variable	Estimate	Std. error	Statistic	p-value	OR	OR p-value
(Intercept)	1.363049	1.333406	1.022231	0.306672	3.908	0.307
HH head's gender: Male	-0.86496	0.610628	-1.41651	0.156626	0.421	0.157
Monthly income	-2E-05	1.07E-05	-1.86696	0.012219	1	0.012
Marital status: Married	-1.98364	0.779733	-2.54399	0.010959	0.138	0.011
Marital status: Widowed	-1.19623	1.040669	-1.14948	0.250357	0.302	0.25
Number of children	0.138932	0.109878	1.264425	0.206077	1.149	0.206
Distance to school	0.232378	0.089097	2.608155	0.009103	1.262	0.009
Male children in household	0.795622	0.496919	1.601111	0.010935	2.216	0.011
Early pregnancy: Yes	0.674994	0.525296	1.284979	0.01988	1.964	0.019
HH head's education: Primary	-0.00063	0.580072	-0.00108	0.999135	0.999	0.999
HH head's education: Secondary	-1.5365	0.677444	-2.26808	0.023325	0.215	0.023

HH head's education: Higher	-0.25983	1.238551	-0.20979	0.833833	0.771	0.834
Early marriage: Yes	-0.03589	0.548049	-0.06549	0.049478	0.965	0.049
School infrastructure present	-0.18324	0.482591	-0.37971	0.704163	0.833	0.704
HH head's occupation: Secondary	0.433771	0.640804	0.676917	0.498458	1.543	0.498
HH head's occupation: Tertiary	0.967849	0.613621	1.577274	0.114732	2.632	0.115
HH head's religion: Indigenous	0.365614	0.565527	0.646501	0.517955	1.441	0.518
HH head's religion: Muslim	0.629655	0.640829	0.982563	0.325823	1.877	0.326

HH = household head. OR = odds ratio. p-value = p-value associated with the Wald statistic. Estimate = estimated coefficient (logit). Std. error = standard error. Statistic = Wald statistic. A p-value < 0.05 indicates a statistically significant effect. Categorical variables were coded as indicator variables with an implicit, unshown reference category.; *Source: Field survey, 2025*

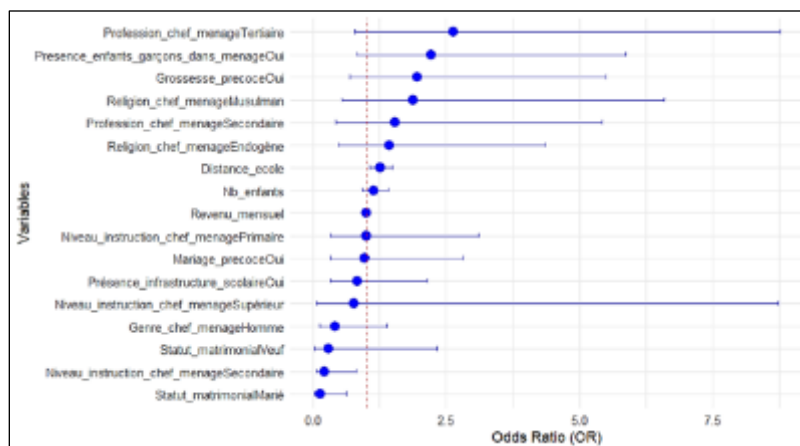


Figure 3: Odds ratios of factors associated with school dropout among girls in the study context

3.4 Personal and social consequences of dropping out of school

Dropping out of school generates multifaceted personal and social consequences (Figure 4). At the personal level, 62.7% (95% CI: [51.24–74.16%]) report losing confidence in their intellectual abilities or occupational future, a loss of self-esteem often reinforced by community stigma. Social withdrawal is also common: 48.9% (95% CI: [37.32–60.48%]) report reduced or severed ties with former school or community circles, exposing them to progressive isolation, emotional dependency, or poorly supported early life choices. At the health level, 27.4% (95% CI: [16.95–37.85%]) faced unwanted pregnancy or early motherhood after leaving school, often without adequate medical or psychological support — a major barrier to reintegration and a driver of continued socioeconomic vulnerability. At the community level, 54.2% (95% CI: [42.72–65.68%]) say the absence of formal education limits their participation in associative, civic, or political life, reducing their advocacy power and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Economically, 39.6% (95% CI: [28.42–50.78%]) report being entirely dependent on parents, spouse, or family to meet daily needs, a dependency that undermines their autonomy and limits access to income-generating opportunities.

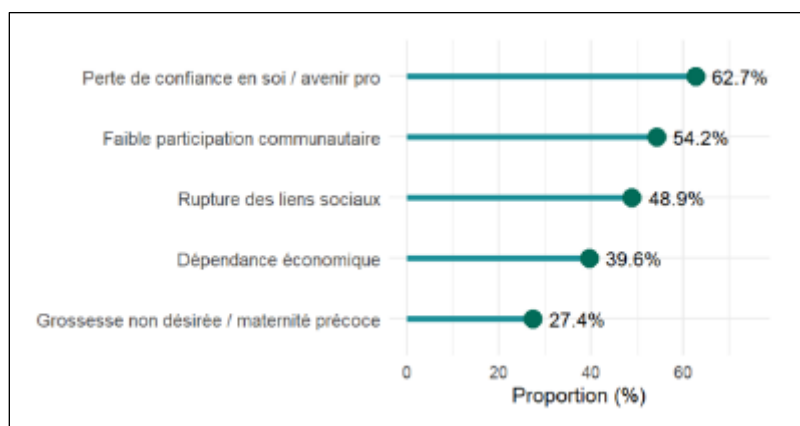


Figure 4: Personal and social consequences of girls' school dropout in Sakété

3.5 Obstacles to school or vocational reintegration

Reintegration into school or vocational training faces multidimensional, often interlinked obstacles (Table 5), as identified by girls, parents, teachers, and community leaders. Psychologically, the most cited difficulties are doubt about academic ability after dropping out (72.28%) and low self-esteem linked to shame or fear of judgment (70.53%), often compounded by trauma linked to violence or early pregnancy (55.44%). Institutional constraints are also significant: lack of adequate infrastructure such as sanitation or childcare (69.12%), absence of reintegration schemes (47.72%), and programmes unsuited to out-of-school girls' needs (43.16%). Economically, the high cost of schooling (57.54%) and the loss of family labour that returning to school represents (35.44%) are major barriers. Socially, persistent stigmatization (53.33%), unfavourable gender norms (37.19%), and an educational preference for boys (34.39%) all weigh on reintegration prospects, alongside weak parental or spousal support (51.23%), disengaged community leaders (52.28%), and resistance to pregnant girls or young mothers returning to school (45.61%).

Table 5: Main obstacles to school reintegration for girls after dropping out

Category	Specific factors	1	2	3	4	5
Social and cultural	Stigmatization and social judgment of out-of-school girls	2.81%	8.07%	4.91%	30.88%	53.33%
Social and cultural	Gender norms unfavourable to schooling	5.26%	15.09%	15.79%	26.67%	37.19%
Social and cultural	Educational preference for boys	7.37%	11.93%	23.86%	22.46%	34.39%
Economic	Cost of schooling (registration, supplies, uniform, transport)	1.75%	2.46%	4.21%	34.04%	57.54%
Economic	Loss of domestic or agricultural labour for the family	12.63%	16.14%	28.77%	7.02%	35.44%
Institutional	Refusal of enrolment / no reintegration policy	3.86%	3.51%	22.11%	22.81%	47.72%
Institutional	School programmes unsuited to out-of-school girls' needs	1.40%	0.70%	24.21%	30.53%	43.16%
Institutional	Lack of adequate infrastructure (childcare, sanitation, etc.)	1.40%	0.70%	8.07%	20.70%	69.12%
Family and community	Weak parental/family support or refusal	3.86%	3.51%	18.25%	23.16%	51.23%
Family and community	Lack of involvement of community leaders (traditional/religious)	2.46%	2.11%	16.84%	26.32%	52.28%
Family and community	Community resistance to pregnant girls/young mothers returning	2.81%	1.40%	26.67%	23.51%	45.61%
Psychological and personal	Low self-esteem, shame, fear of others' judgment	0.70%	1.40%	4.91%	22.46%	70.53%
Psychological and personal	Trauma linked to violence or early pregnancy	3.16%	2.11%	3.86%	35.44%	55.44%
Psychological and personal	Doubt about academic ability after an interruption	1.40%	1.75%	7.37%	17.19%	72.28%

3.6 Prospects for integration and citizen proposals

Participatory consultation with local stakeholders identified several priority avenues for reintegrating out-of-school girls (Figure 5). Vocational training tailored to local realities (crafts, agro-food processing, sewing) was the most widely supported proposal (77%; n = 220), followed by school catch-up centres and flexible reintegration schemes (69%; n = 197) and community awareness projects mobilizing traditional and religious leaders to dismantle unfavourable social norms (64.2%; n = 183). Psychosocial support and mentoring mechanisms to restore self-esteem and build resilience were highlighted by 47% (n = 134), while 40% called for institutional advocacy to improve the legal and policy environment, and 36% proposed strengthening family and parental engagement in girls' educational success. These priorities converge strongly around the educational, economic, and social dimensions of inclusion.

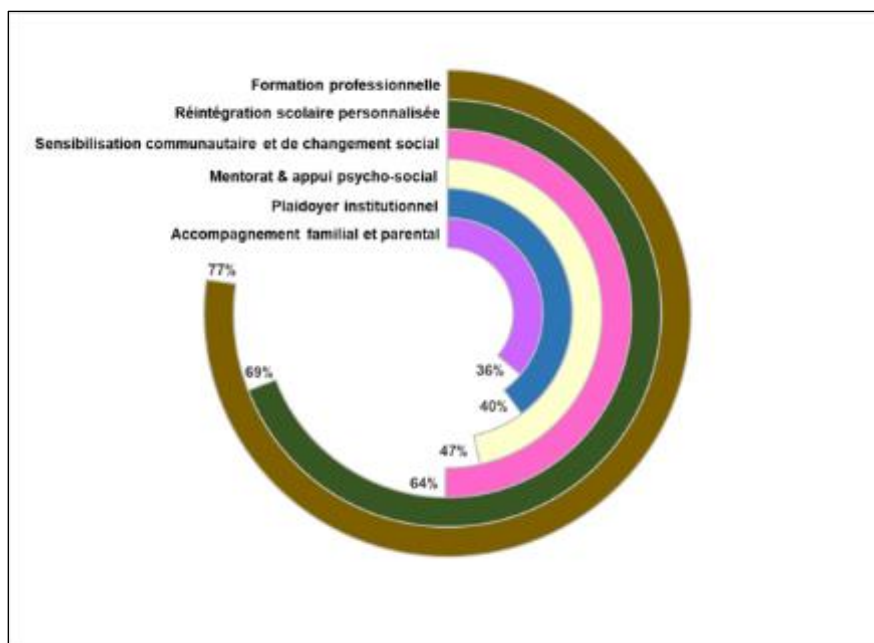


Figure 5: Typology of school and socioeconomic reintegration projects for out-of-school girls

3.7 Perceived causes of girls' school dropout

Local perceptions confirm that girls' school dropout in Sakété stems from a complex, interacting mix of structural, socioeconomic, cultural, and individual factors rather than any single cause. The prioritization of boys' education, cited by nearly 69% of respondents, reflects deep-rooted gendered social norms that continue to marginalize girls' schooling — a pattern not specific to Sakété but consistent with trends observed elsewhere in Africa, where family educational preferences have been shown to discriminate against girls in low-income countries [30,31].

Economic constraints the need for help at home (66%) and financial hardship (65%) reflect the structural weight of poverty, echoing evidence that children, especially girls, are often seen as supplementary household labour in poor households [32,33]. The feminization of poverty reinforces this pattern, as girls are typically the first mobilized for trade, agricultural, or domestic tasks at the expense of schooling compounded by the absence of protective policies such as conditional cash transfers, which have proven effective elsewhere [34]. The issue here is as much economic as symbolic, since school is sometimes seen as a luxury or a poor short-term investment.

Individual or psychosocial causes personal disinterest (RFC = 0.59) and repeated academic failure (RFC = 0.51) point to a dynamic of progressive disengagement often fuelled by negative school experiences, echoing evidence on how school climate, humiliation, stigmatization, and symbolic violence undermine girls' motivation [35,36]. The education system itself, when it fails to account for girls' specific needs and social realities, can thus contribute to their gradual marginalization.

Sociocultural (gender norms, early marriage, parental refusal) and institutional factors (school remoteness, inadequate infrastructure), though mentioned less often, show high consensus (ICF > 0.93), confirming that dropout is not an isolated or accidental event but the outcome of an unequal social and educational system. These factors are often interconnected — school remoteness compounds the effect of social norms that undervalue girls' education making school discontinuity a cumulative process rooted in deeply unequal social relations.

3.8 Explanatory factors of school dropout

The logistic regression refines these qualitative findings by identifying factors objectively associated with dropout probability. School remoteness ($p = 0.009$; OR = 1.26) is a significant determinant, consistent with evidence that distance is a major barrier to regular attendance for girls, owing to insecurity, fatigue, and exposure to destabilizing environments [35,37].

The presence of male children in the household ($p = 0.011$; OR = 2.22) nearly doubles girls' dropout risk, reflecting unequal intra-household competition for educational resources and a male educational preference rooted in parental attitudes [38]: where resources are limited, educating boys is often seen as the more profitable investment, further marginalizing girls.

Early pregnancy ($p = 0.019$; $OR = 1.96$) is also a determining factor, producing an abrupt and often irreversible break in schooling in the absence of reintegration schemes or amid strong social stigma [35,6] a pattern heightened where moral and religious norms condemn adolescent motherhood without a second chance. Evidence from Nigeria and Ghana confirms that, absent inclusive policies, most young mothers face long-term exclusion from school [39,37].

Conversely, some factors protect against dropout. A household head with secondary education ($p = 0.023$; $OR = 0.22$) significantly reduces risk, underscoring the role of parental educational capital in valuing and supporting children's schooling [40,41]. Being married ($p = 0.011$; $OR = 0.14$) also appears stabilizing, potentially reflecting better-organized parental responsibilities or greater household security. Although modest ($OR \approx 1$), the significant effect of monthly income ($p = 0.012$) confirms that a minimum level of resources is needed to sustain girls' access to school, notably for indirect costs such as transport and supplies.

Variables such as the household head's religion, occupation, or the mere presence of schools show no significant correlation with dropout, possibly reflecting sample homogeneity or indirect effects masked by stronger determinants such as distance or household structure.

3.9 Implications for educational policies and school retention strategies

These findings offer a solid empirical basis for rethinking policy against girls' school dropout, pointing to interventions that are multifaceted and locally adapted. Structural measures nearby schools, safe school transport, boarding facilities for girls — are proven levers against the effects of remoteness in other rural sub-Saharan contexts [42] and should be adapted to Sakété's peripheral areas. Tackling early pregnancy requires a multisectoral response combining comprehensive sexuality education, reproductive health services, and inclusive, supportive reintegration policies, as demonstrated in Ghana and South Africa through psychological support, adapted schedules, and childcare arrangements for young mothers. Given the strong influence of household heads' education and marital status on girls' schooling, parental and community awareness programmes should actively involve religious, traditional, and local leaders, who can play a decisive role in shifting social norms. For girls already out of school, alternatives such as catch-up centres, flexible vocational training, and mentoring schemes should be paired with incentives (scholarships, school kits, free meals) that address their specific constraints. Ultimately, an effective response requires sustained intersectoral coordination linking education with health, social justice, child protection, and community development underpinned by clear legislative frameworks and adequate funding.

4 CONCLUSION

This study shows that girls' school dropout in Sakété is a systemic phenomenon rooted in interacting socioeconomic, cultural, educational, and institutional factors. Girls face multiple disruptions in their school trajectories linked to economic precarity, gender-based social norms, low parental education, geographic remoteness, and reproductive events such as pregnancy and early marriage. The binary logistic regression confirms the significance of distance to school ($OR = 1.26$; $p < 0.01$), male children in the household ($OR = 2.22$; $p < 0.05$), early pregnancy ($OR = 1.96$; $p < 0.05$), household head's marital status ($OR = 0.14$ for married heads; $p < 0.05$), and secondary education of the household head ($OR = 0.22$; $p < 0.05$) an accumulation of structural obstacles alongside identifiable levers of resilience. School infrastructure, occupation, and religion of the household head appear non-significant, suggesting indirect or moderate effects. Qualitatively, dropping out generates personal consequences (loss of self-esteem, social withdrawal, economic precarity) and community-level consequences (low civic participation, reproduction of gender inequalities), while reintegration is hindered by numerous interdependent obstacles, from social stigmatization to a lack of concrete opportunities. These findings call for multidimensional public action attentive to local realities and to the diversity of girls' trajectories.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest associated with this study.

Statement of ethical approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles governing research involving human participants.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all adult respondents, and from parents or legal guardians on behalf of minor participants, prior to data collection. The anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents were maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting.

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