

A Survey of the Influence of Family Nature, Peer Association and Gender on Academic Performance: A Case of Kisii Municipality

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Abstract

The study was carried out in Kisii municipality of south western Kenya. The objectives of the study were to examine the relationships between pupil's family nature and academic performance; the relationship between peer group association and academic performance and the relationship between gender and students academic performance. The survey involved students in selected secondary schools, teachers and parents within the municipality. The research was conducted by administering three types of questionnaires - students (A), teachers (B) and parents (C). Information was also got by personal observation and oral- non - scheduled interview involving 140 students, 40 parents and 40 teachers. The findings were analyzed using frequency tables. The result show that a child's academic performance is determined to a large extent by the family size which is instrumental in assisting him/ her in learning. There is a significant relationship between peer group association and academic performance of a child. The results also indicate that there is a significant relationship between gender and one's academic performance.

Keywords: Nature of family, gender, peer group, academic performance

Introduction

A school is not an island , it is an important component of the larger society. The manner in which children are brought up or treated at home directly affects the way they behave in school and eventually their academic performance. Schools in Kisii municipality have a heterogeneous student population, socially . These social differences in turn affect their behaviour in school and later, this also affect their performance in examinations . There are many factors in the society which may promote or retard a child's academic performance in school. The way a child is brought up and where he/she grows up is very important as it finally influences the kind of life he/she will lead in the future . A child's ethnic background , family social status including the nature of the family itself , sex and peer influence in a way may affect the performance of as student- academically . Datta Ansu (1992) , in his studies on educational development in various societies found that educational backwardness is only caused by the absence of educational opportunities which indeed lacks in many communities today. In this cases , the disabilities suffered by members of the educationally backward regions, and communities are also the consequences of the accumulated impact of some or all of the above factors. Most students in this country do not perform academically well despite being provided with all facilities and/or being in well- equipped schools. It is possible that besides facilities and having competent and qualified teachers, there could be some social forces that can hinder one's maximum academic output. As mentioned earlier a school interacts with its larger society. If factors within the society are favourable for growth and development of the school, students will likewise do well in their studies. However, if these factors are unfavourable, pupils' academic performance would likewise be poor . The purpose of this research therefore was to examine social factors which directly or indirectly affect or influence the academic achievement of a number of students in Kenya, with special reference to Kisii urban schools.

The findings of this research provide valuable information to educationists at all levels of knowledge dissemination including potential scholars in all educational institutions.

It is hoped that the findings will positively influence the social and academic status of all students, their immediate families and the society at large. This will finally improve the overall performance of schools in all examinations.

The objectives of the study were:

- i) To examine the relationship between pupil's family nature and academic performance.
- ii) To examine the relationship between peer group association and academic performance.
- iii) To examine the relationship between gender and students academic performance.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Kisii municipality, in south western Kenya. The research was principally carried out by use of questionnaires, besides non-scheduled personal interviews and observation. The research involved students in secondary schools, selected teachers and parents within the municipality. The students were divided into three categories; girls secondary schools, boys secondary schools and mixed secondary schools. From each category one school was randomly selected from the single sex schools and two from the mixed categories. A total of four schools, namely Kisii Boys, Kereri Girls, Gusii Highlights Mixed and Nyanchwa mixed schools were selected. From the population, a sample was drawn (randomly) of 30 students from each of the two schools - Kereri and Nyanchwa which have lower enrolment. A sample of 40 students were drawn also randomly from Kisii high school and Gusii Highlights because of their high enrolment. At least 40 teachers were also sampled randomly from schools within the municipality. The research also sampled 40 parents randomly who have pupils in schools within the municipality.

A list of questions on itemized factors identified above was presented to the students who were required to respond accordingly. The same tools were used to extract information from parents and teachers. The questionnaires were structured such that they were for self completion. To reduce bias or subjectivity, in respondent's answers, students, parents and teachers were free to enquire / ask for clarification when in doubt. The research in addition to the questionnaires gathered useful information by unscheduled oral interview and interaction with parents, teachers and students. The research was conducted by administering three types of questionnaires - students (A), teachers (B) and parents (C). Information was also got by personal observation and oral-nonscheduled interview. There was a sample of 140 students, 40 parents and 40 teachers in this study.

Respondents were to complete, tick their right choices on a 2, 3, 4, or 5 point statement scaled questions involving, True or False, Yes or No, 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' To analyse the data, the number or frequencies were converted to percentages and arranged in suitable tables. These results were then discussed to arrive at suitable conclusion and recommendations.

Results and Discussion

1) Nature of the Family

Although families may be broadly similar, in the same social class, there are often individual differences within each family. Such differences include family size (e.g. number of children, wives, in-laws, grandparents and etc.) and relations within that family (Datta Ansu, 1992).

Relations include one's marital status whether divorced, single, widow e.t.c.. Needless to say, an unhappy home atmosphere, can make children very miserable and cause unpleasant strains within. This later affects the academic performance, of the child.

a) Marital Status

The survey showed that many parents had marital problems. In the study, 40 parents responded to a questionnaire whose results are summarized in the table 1.

Only 35% (14 of the 40 respondents) have normal family set-ups (mother and father) compared to single, separated, divorced and widow/widower cases which all account for 65% when combined.

This is a high number, from a sample of 40, which partly explains the high incidences of broken homes in the municipality. Broken homes are often characterized by poor child upbringing and poverty.

In a broken home the atmosphere may be noisy, quite inhospitable for a child to sit down and study. The situation is even worse if one of the parents is absent. All these problems lead to low academic achievement in school.

b) Family Size

The size of one's family may play a role in determining a child's academic performance. The survey found that most families within the municipality have more than 4 children. In this study, in which 40 parents were involved, one had one child, 4 had two children, 8 had three children, 10 had four children while the remaining 18 had more than four children. Table 2 summarizes these findings. The Table shows that many families have many members (18 of the respondents). These large families have led to over-enrolment in many schools within the municipality, especially in Gusii Highlights school. In these schools some streams had registered 70 or more students. Inside these classrooms, a desk meant for two students is shared by four or five students. In such conditions, there is often no meaningful learning. Individual attention i.e teacher student interaction is very minimal. There is little or no student evaluation. As a result, many students in these schools have become passive participants and have lost interest in learning. Poor performance in examinations is not uncommon.

Although large families cause over enrolment in schools, a larger family may provide company to a child through interaction from older relatives, brothers and sisters. On the other hand, a small family leaves many children lonely and without parental guidance and love. "In their bid to earn a living and get the best from their children, 10-14 year olds are being abandoned by their parents, and communities just when they need their guidance and support" Berger L. (1969). An ideal family size should consist of four members including father and mother, Rongers (1982). Further, with a small family, parents strain little financially and can comfortably educate their children. With a small family, parents can afford to buy their children required educational facilities or materials- textbooks, uniform, and so on. A child can perform well under these conditions.

c) Parents' Literacy

The level of literacy of one's parents may influence and affect the academic performance of a child. The study showed that a good number of parents' level of literacy left a lot to be desired. The survey found that (among 140 students), 85 parents were literate, 18 reported that both parents were illiterate or semi illiterate and 64 had only one literate parent. These findings are captured in Table 3.

Literate parents understand the educational needs of their children and the importance of educating a child. If all parents are illiterate, or semi-illiterate, it is often difficult for them to understand the needs of a child. Under such circumstances children get frustrated and are often least interested in education.

The study sought the opinion of students on the relationship between parents' literacy and their academic performance. The results are summarized in the table 4.

Table 4 shows that 123 respondents from a sample of 140 accepted that when parents are literate, a child's chances of performing better in school are increased, than when they are illiterate. Only 17 respondents did not agree that the level of literacy of the parent affects a child's academic performance. This response may have been made because, occasionally, well educated, but frustrated parents use their bad experiences to justify the way they behave. These frustrations include being jobless, cannot get promoted, and so on. These parents do not normally have motivation to encourage their children to work hard in school. In conclusion, literate parents lay a better foundation for children's education before school and assist them later in school.

2) Peer Group Association

Peer groups tend to form in groups ranging from as few as 2 to even 20 or more. These groups are formed based on interests, ethnic background, geographical location, equality in education, social class, age, and so on, Bennears, 1993.

Youths in such associations discuss various issues ranging from religion to politics and from films to future careers, (Cosin et al, 1977). It is therefore important for one to choose one's associate wisely. If the groups have little interest in learning, their performance will be correspondingly poor in examinations.

Depending on who one is associating with, the group's interest, a child can grow up to be a very useful or a destructive and dangerous person. The responses on the relationship between peer group association and academic performance from 40 teachers in the municipality are summarized in table 5.

The result indicate that almost all (37) teachers accepted that a child's performance in school can be hindered or promoted depending on the interests of the friends he/she associates with. Only 3 teachers responded on the contrary. A child can join a group of drug addicts or a gang of robbers. In such a group, the child will have little or no time to study. On the other hand if a child joins a study group, chances are that he/she may improve his/her grades in examinations.

One of the characteristics of peer association that can hinder a student's academic performance is smoking and drinking. Drinking and smoking among teenagers is now a big problem in Kenya among students. In this study, a survey carried out in which 140 students were to respond to a questionnaire on whether they smoke, drink or take drugs. The results are summarized in the table 6.

Table 6 shows that 16.43% (23 of the 140 respondents) smoke, drink or take drugs. Responses from parents on this problem are shown in table 7.

Table 7 shows that 8 of the 40 (20%) respondents accepted that their children smoke, drink or take drugs. This number may be higher as there are children who smoke or drink or take drugs secretly without their parents knowledge. Many students have joined groups of drug addicts outside school. Many of these students acquire these habits from their peers in school who happen to have been exposed to this dangerous habit at home. There are many drugs teenagers are exposed to in everyday life. "Among hard drugs like cocaine and heroin, mandrax is the easiest and cheapest to obtain with most youths hooked into doing the trade. The discovery of local plants that could be used to make mandrax tablets has played a significant role in its increase", according to the United Nations Drug Control Programme (1987). Other drugs easily obtained are bhang and maryjuane. Smoking, drinking as well as taking drugs are a source of indiscipline in school besides lowering the school's academic performance.

Many students who indulge in these habits are not aware of the consequences of their continued use. These students are often reluctant to abandon the habits because of curiosity – to discover something new or taste something new. It makes them adventurous and to be identified with popular names of famous people like musicians. On peer group influence, students were required to state if they agree or disagree if friends discourage/hinder them from studying. Data collected was summarized in Table 8.

The table shows that more than half (57.14) of the students in the study accepted that friends/peer can discourage or hinder them from studying. This is achieved by shouting at them, abusing them or using derogatory language (e.g "don't be a bookworm"). They can tease them or even make a lot of noise, taking away one's books, telling stories that discourage or that depict a negative picture of studying (e.g, "there are no jobs"). If they do not achieve their objective, one may even be beaten up or disowned - leading to loneliness (Colin, 1982). Yet as table 8 indicates, 22.14% and 12.85% disagreed and strongly disagreed (respectively) that friends do not discourage one from studying. As mentioned above peer association can sometimes be useful (e.g if one joins a study group). This is presented by the 49 respondents in Table 6, depending on the values of the group. Other useful associations include sports associations and religions groups. Other factors being constant, a student in these groups should be able to do well academically.

This survey also sought to find out if students find it comfortable or uncomfortable studying in the company of the opposite sex. Students were to indicate on a 5 scaled item to what extent they agree or disagreed to studying while in the company of the opposite sex. Data collected was summarized in table 9.

More than 2/3 of the respondents accepted that single sex study groups are better than a mixed group. Less than 18% felt better studying as a mixed sex group. It is therefore clear that single sex schools are more beneficial than are mixed sex schools academically. The results above also explain why most single sex schools perform better in examinations than mixed schools.

However, many parents suggested that boys and girls should start relating when they are teenagers, but not get involved in sex. “Teachers should allow platonic relationships where boys and girls relate with each other without sex. It is part of growing up, (Brian, 1976).

This relationship is said to be important as it is the ‘starting group’ for adult relationships. It is a stage that prepares someone for life and if you miss it, then your social life is doomed” one parent remarked. As for single sex schools. “it is necessary for teachers to allow outings that will encourage boys and girls to interact because when they are locked up they will engage in sexual relationships once they get the opportunity”, (Gitau, 1981), Peer group association should therefore be encouraged when the activities they indulge in are constructive, but be discouraged if such activities are destructive.

3) Gender and Academic Performance

On a 5 scaled item, 40 teachers sampled were to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that, “the sex of a student determines his / her academic performance.” The results are summarized in the Table 10.

The Table shows that 26 (65%) of the teachers administered with the questionnaire agreed that “a student's sex determines his/ her academic performance”. This is an overwhelmingly large number compared to 9 and 3 who disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. These results indicate that one's sex can determine his/ her academic performance. However, the table shows that 25% claimed that a child's sex cannot determine his her academic performance. Boys and girls have equal chances of performing as well as the other, other factors being constant. However, a large number of parents and teachers recommended that girls should be given more educational opportunities, as they are discriminated against. In many African societies, parents prefer to educate boy children at the expense of girl children (Ansu, 1992). According to Ansu (1992) many African societies regard girls as commodities that can be exchanged for animals in the market for the payment of dowry.

f) Sexual - abuse in Female Students

The survey administered questionnaire to the 40 sampled parents who were to indicate how many children they know that have dropped out of school due to an unwanted pregnancy. The results indicated that 4 parents accepted that one of their girls had dropped out of school and two parents had 2 girls who had dropped out of school because of pregnancy. Table 11 summarizes these findings.

The above statistics indicate that for every 40 families, 6 have had one or more of their daughters drop out of school due to pregnancy. Girls who drop out of school rarely go back to complete their studies. The few who return to school much later are often embarrassed, shy or depressed, in addition to having to take care of a child at home. Many of them do not perform well at the end.

The survey also sought to find the feelings of parents on this issue of school girls drop outs due to pregnancies and the use of contraceptives or abortion as control measure. The findings are shown in the table 12.

The above table shows that a large number (23) (57.5%) of the respondents support the issue of contraceptives and legalizing abortion for school - girls that they can be able to advance or complete their studies.

Only 22.5% (9 of the 40 respondents) did not accept that contraceptives and abortion should be made accessible to school- girls; 8 of the 40 respondents were uncertain. Many parents recommended use of safe contraceptives which are cheaply and easily available in many family planning clinics throughout the country. Besides, teenagers, should be counseled to abstain from sex before they complete school or before marriage. All these can only be achieved if parents, teachers and students discuss the issue of sexuality freely. Only then can the society come nearer to reducing this problem.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results show that a child's academic performance is determined to a large extent by the family size which is instrumental in assisting him/ her in learning, The larger the family, the less attention parents give to individual children socially, morally and emotionally.

The smaller the family the stronger the family bond if the parents spend time with their children and are able to support them properly. Therefore a child's academic performance depends on the nature of his/her family.

There is a relationship between peer group association and academic performance of a child. A child's friends normally determine what he/she does most of their time.

The study findings show that the academic performance of a child to a large extent depends on a child's peer association. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between gender and one's academic performance.

It is recommended that the government should open up more denominational schools or schools that offer spiritual teachings to the pupils not only in Kisii municipality but throughout the country. Religion assists students to excel in school academically, besides shaping their moral behaviour. Currently there are more open schools offering little or no religious teachings. In addition, teaching and other formal activities of the curriculum be strictly carried out between Monday and Friday, so that Saturday and Sundays are left free for religious activities as may be appropriate. The government should set-up, and distribute provincial schools evenly in the country, such that students from various locations in the country are able to attend.

That a new government order should oppose the 'apartheid of gender' in education as vigorously as the apartheid of race. In many rural areas and some urban areas, more boys become literate than girls. To discriminate against girls in education is the biggest mistake of all. Many cultural traditions and roles assigned to women are detrimental to their educational advancement. All women (including school-going girls) should have access to safe contraceptives so that they can have children as and when appropriate.

More youth centres for counseling as well as government psychiatrists be made available freely. This can reduce alcoholism, drug taking, including smoking among the youth, besides, the government should consider building more rehabilitation centres, including establishment of juvenile courts. Much should be done to improve counseling services due to the increasing tragedy of youth suicide-- in many schools, homes, colleges or universities. Schools must be fully involved in helping children, having guidance teachers is not enough -- suicide prevention need to be included in health promotion programmes in the school. There should be a move to consider the de-registration of schools which are poorly sited. These schools include those that were originally planned for other business, but have now been converted to classrooms. They lie next to bus stations, night clubs, markets etc. Such social activities are a great hindrance to meaningful learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Learning’s Questionnaire

This is not an examination. Do not write your name anywhere in this paper. Please read each item and complete it. The best answer is the one you have given honestly. The information you give will be treated as confidential.

Name of school _____

Your sex Male () Female ()

Your age _____

1. a) Complete the following table on your ethnic identification

NATIONALITY	COLOUR	TRIBE

b) Do you get any special favour or suffer any form of discrimination because you belong to a particular tribe /race , colour or nationality.

Yes ()

No ()

2. a) Please tick the statement that best describes your parents literacy

i) All are literate ()

ii) All are illiterate ()

iii) Only one is literate ()

b) Do you feel , you could perform better in schools if all your parents were literate?

Yes ()

No ()

3. a) Put a tick against the statement that best applies to you

i) Both parents are working , school fees is not a problem ()

ii) Only one parent is working m school fees is a problem ()

iii) both parents are not working school, fees is a big problem ()

b) Indicate the marital status of your parents by ticking the statement that best applies to your

i) Mother and father living ()

ii) Single parent ()

iii) Separated ()

iv) Divorced ()

v) Mother and father dead ()

4. Put a tick against the statement that best describes you

i) It is more comfortable / better when one studies in the company of the opposites sex.

Strongly agree ()

Agree ()

Uncertain/ Undecided ()

Disagree ()

Strongly disagree ()

ii) Do you or any of your friends smoke ,take drugs or drink?

Yes ()

No ()

5. Do your friends discourage you from studying e.g by calling you a “ bookworm” ?

Strongly agree ()

Agree ()

Uncertain/ Undecided ()

Disagree ()

Strongly disagree ()

2. a) Please indicate the religion you and your parents belong to ;

Religion /denomination	Student	Parent
Catholic		
S.D.A		
Protestant		
Muslim		
Animatism/ Ancestor		
Rachel Mariah		
Pagan		
Other		

b) A students religion/ denomination and that of the parents can hinder one’s academic perform ace

- Strongly agree ()
- Agree ()
- Uncertain/ Undecided ()
- Disagree ()
- Strongly disagree ()

3. There is favouritism in educational opportunities for boys

- True ()
- False ()

Appendix B

Teachers’ Questionnaire

Please answer all questions in this questionnaire truthfully. The best answer is one you have given honestly. The information you give will be treated as confidential

Name of school _____

Your grade _____

Age _____

Please put a tick inside the box corresponding to your best answer.

1. The sex of a student determines his / her academic performance
 - Strongly agree ()
 - Agree ()
 - Uncertain/ Undecided ()
 - Disagree ()
 - Strongly disagree ()

2. A student’s religion / denomination, that of the parents and the school has no effect on his / her academic achievement.
 - Strongly agree ()
 - Agree ()
 - Uncertain/ Undecided ()
 - Disagree ()
 - Strongly disagree ()

3. The academic performance of students depends on the particular ethnic back group from which he/she hails from:
 - Strongly agree ()
 - Agree ()
 - Uncertain/ Undecided ()
 - Disagree ()
 - Strongly disagree ()

4. Pupils from rich, well to do homes tend to perform much better than those from poor homes
- Strongly agree ()
 Agree ()
 Uncertain/ Undecided ()
 Disagree ()
 Strongly disagree ()
5. Peer group association have no effect on a students academic performance.
- Strongly agree ()
 Agree ()
 Uncertain/ Undecided ()
 Disagree ()
 Strongly disagree ()
6. a) Based on your own experience , briefly state some social factors that affect students academic performance in your school
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- b) Please suggest what can be one to solve these social problems affecting our students
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Appendix C

Parents' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to help identify some of the issues related to the social factors affecting academic performance in Kenya schools . You , apparent , are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire and be assures that the information got from you will be used for the purpose mentioned above. Do not write your name anywhere.

Name of school _____

Your sex Male () Female ()

1. a) Complete the following table

NATIONALITY	COLOUR	TRIBE

b) indicate your marital status by putting a tick inside the box corresponding to the statement that best allies to you;

- Married ()
 Single parent ()
 Separated ()
 Divorced ()
 Widow/ widower ()

2. a) How many child do you have

- One child ()
- Two children ()
- Three children ()
- More than four children ()
- More than four children ()

b) What can you say about KBC television programmes

- () They have greatly assisted children to learn better in school
- () They are an hindrance to children’s learning.

3. a) Does any of you children smoke/ drink or take drugs?

- Yes ()
- No ()

b) Has any of your children even dropped out of school/ because of pregnancy? How many?

- () one
- () two
- () Three
- () none

c) School girls should be accessible to contraceptive and be allowed to abort to determinate unwanted pregnancies while in school.

- Agree ()
- Undecided ()
- Disagree ()

4. a) Do you give boy children first priority in fee payment ?

- Yes ()
- No ()

b) Children should be encouraged to speak English or Kiswahili at home. This helps them to learn feaster ins school

- Agree ()
- Disagree ()

5. As a parent/ Guardian , what are the social problems affecting your children at home or in the locality you live in, that affect their academic performance ? Please list them

6.can you suggest some solutions to theses social problems you problems you listed above

Appendix D**Tables****Table 1: Marital Status of Parents in Kisii Municipality**

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	%
Married	14	35
Single parent	10	25
Separated	6	15
Divorced	6	15
Widow/ widower	4	10
Total	40	100

Table 2: Number of Children per Family in Kisii Municipality

NUMBER OF CHILDREN	FREQUENCY	%
One child	0	0
Two children	4	10
Three children	8	20
Four children	10	25
More than four children	18	45
Total	40	100

Table3: Literacy of Parents in Kisii Municipality

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY	%
Father and mother literate	58	41.42
Father and mother illiterate or semi - literate	18	12.85
Only one parent literate	64	45.7
Total	140	100

Table 4: Relationship between Parents' Literacy and Students Performance

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY	%
Parent's literacy assists in a child's academic performance	123	87.85
Parent's literacy does not affect a child's academic performance	17	12.13
Total	140	100

Table 5: Relationship between Peer Group Association and Academic Performance

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY	%
Peer association has little or no effect on a student academic performance	3	7.5
Peer association has a larger effect on a student's academic performance	37	92.5
Total	40	100

Table 6: Frequency of Smoking and Drug Use in Kisii Municipality

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY	%
Students who smoke drink or take drugs	23	16.43
Students who do NOT smoke, drink or take drugs	117	83.5
Total	140	100

Table 7: Parents Whose Children Smoke Drink or Take Drugs

STATEMENT	FREQUENCY	%
Parents whose children smoke drink or take drugs	8	20
Parents whose children do not smoke ,drink or take drugs	32	80
Total	40	100

Table 8: Attitude of Students towards Peers on Studies

Opinion/ attitude	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	14	10
Agree	66	47.14
Uncertain	11	7.86
Disagree	31	22.14
Strongly disagree	18	12.85
Total	140	100

Table 9: Attitude of Students towards Studying in the Company of Opposite's Sex

OPINION/ ATTITUDE	FREQUENCY	%
Strongly agree	47	33.57
Agree	58	41.42
Uncertain	10	7.14
Disagree	23	16.42
Strongly disagree	2	1.43
Total	140	100

Table 10: Attitude of Teachers on Sex and Academic Performance

OPINION / ATTITUDE	FREQUENCY	%
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	26	65
Undecided	2	5
Disagree	9	22.5
Strongly disagree	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Table 11: Number of School Drop Outs Due to Pregnancy in Kisii Municipality

NUMBER	FREQUENCY	%
One	4	10
Two	2	5
Three	0	0
None	34	85
Total	40	100

Table 12: Attitude of Parents towards Use of Contraceptive and Abortion for Girls

Statement	Frequency	%
Yes, school girls should be given contraceptives or allowed to perform abortion	23	57.5
No, School - girls should not be given contraceptive nor be allowed to perform abortion	9	22.5
Uncertain	8	20
Total	40	100

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