

# Gender Differences in Academic Resilience and Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students in Kiambu County, Kenya



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## Abstract

This study sought to establish the gender differences in academic resilience and academic achievement among secondary school students in Kiambu County. The study adopted a descriptive co relational design. A sample of 390 from three students was used. A demographic form and the California Healthy Kids Survey-Module B version were employed in data collection. It was hypothesized that there were no significant mean differences in academic resilience given student's gender. This was tested using the independent samples t-test. Significant gender differences in mean academic resilience scores were found in favor of girls ( $t = 1.97$ ,  $df = 388$ ,  $p = .05$ ). It was recommended that appropriate intervention programmers that target boys be put in place in order to optimize their academic resilience and functioning.

**Keywords:** Academic Resilience; Gender Differences; Academic Achievement; Secondary School Students.

## Introduction

Across countries, boys and girls differ in academic resilience and academic achievement. According to Reimer [1] numerous studies assert that gender is a critical factor in determining the resilience and vulnerability of individuals. Studies on the impact of gender on resilience give mixed results. Edwin [2] reported higher resilience in females, while Lees [3] reported higher resilience among the males. Sun and Stewart [4] have advocated for further investigations on the effects of gender on academic resilience and the consequent academic achievement. A study by Mousavi and Askari [5] carried out among 276 male and female students of Shiraz University, observed that the resilience of female students was higher than that of male students. In Kenya, the candidature trends indicate that more males than females register for the KCSE (Table 1). Juma and Simatwa [6] observed that girls have continued to lag behind boys in secondary education, particularly in Kisumu East County. One of the biggest obstacles for female students may be the familial and social cultural obligations such as domestic chores which place undue pressure on females, and, consequently, on their academic resilience and achievement.

As presented in Table 2 the overall national grade summaries in the KCSE in 2011 and 2012 depict that more males than females

attained quality grades that may have secured them admission to the universities. This implies that more female candidates are in the wastage bracket, since the cut-off to university is grade C+.

**Table 1:** KCSE Candidature Trends in Kenya 2005-2012.

Year	Male	Female	Total
2005	141,256	119,409	260,665
2006	129,071	114,382	243,453
2007	150,127	126,112	276,239
2008	165,591	139,424	305,015
2009	184,563	152,841	337,404
2010	198,100	159,388	357,488
2011	229,171	182,612	411,783
2012	241,139	195,210	436,349

**Table 2:** KCSE Overall Grade Summary for 2011 and 2012.

Gender	Year	A	A-	B+	B-	C+	C-
Male	2011	1315	6322	11150	14793	18344	22474
	2012	1277	5947	11753	15962	18936	22180
Female	2011	615	2741	5240	8151	11771	16742
	2012	698	3288	5977	9221	12174	16291
All	2011	1930	9063	16390	22944	30115	39216
	2012	1975	9235	17730	25183	31110	38471
Cum Total	2011	1930	10993	27383	50327	80442	119658
	2012	1975	11210	28940	54123	85233	123704

Gender differences in academic resilience may explain the aforementioned differences in academic achievement. Geesen [7] opines that gender plays an important role in resilience. In a meta-analysis consisting of 19 studies of school-based interventions aimed at promoting resilience, she suggested that gender influence should be investigated in future research on resilience. Morales [8] concur that the role that gender plays in the process of academic resilience should be explored further. This study therefore investigated gender differences in academic resilience among secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite the numerous studies on determinants of academic resilience, variations in resilience across gender remain underexplored. According to Collin-Vezina et al. [9] resilience processes have been reported to involve unique pathways among different genders and cultures. Examining the gender perspective in academic resilience provides an insight regarding how male and female students conceptualize and express academic resilience in order to overcome setbacks. According to Morales [8] gender has been identified as a crucial aspect of resilience yet gender differences in the resilience process have not been the focus of resilience studies. Using a sample of 390 secondary school students, this study set out to investigate gender differences in academic resilience, in a different cultural setting, that is, Kenya.

### Review of Related Literature

Research on impact of gender on resilience has not been consistent in all studies. In their research, Conner and Davidson [10] observed no group differences in gender. Conversely, Lees [3] undertook a study on the impact of resilience on the academic achievement of at-risk students in the upward bound program in Georgia; USA. The results indicated group differences in gender, where the females were reported as more resilient than the males.

A study by Wasonga [11] on 559 ninth and twelfth- grade high school students, found that gender had an effect on external

protective factors (domain of academic resilience), among urban high school students. Significantly greater caring relations, high expectations and opportunities for participation in meaningful activities (external assets) from parents, teachers, peers and adults in the community were available to girls than boys. Girls also scored higher on resiliency.

A cross sectional population based study by Edwin [2] explored the effect of age and gender on resilience and protective factors for mental health in primary school aged children in Brisbane, Australia. Surveys were administered to 1109 male and 1163 female students (n=2492). The study assessed self perception of resilience and associated protective factors. Female students were found to be more likely to report higher levels of communication, empathy, help-seeking and goals for future and aspirations. They also reported more positive connections with parents, teachers and adults in the community, peers in school and outside school, as well as sense of autonomy experience.

A study by Morales [1] explored gender differences in academic resilience of 31 female and 19 male low socio-economic college students of color. The findings indicated that statistically significant differences were found among males and females in academic resilience, in favor of females. This was similar to the findings of Shehu and Mokgwathi [12]. They carried out a descriptive case control design that compared internal resilience factors and health locus of control between physical education and non-physical education students exposed to other elective subjects, who were termed as the controls or referents (N = 1700). The sample was drawn from the central and south regions of Botswana. Females were 52% while males constituted 48% of the sample. Girls in this study reported higher resilience than males. This finding was consistent with earlier research indicating gender differences in locus of control. This may imply that girls have a higher capacity than boys due to socialization patterns that may engender differential socio-emotional development and relations with peers and adults.

A study by Mokoena [13] investigated the relationship between gender, socioeconomic status, and exposure to violence and resilience in a sample of students at the University of the

Western Cape. It involved a secondary analysis of survey data. The sample comprised 281 students. The study hypothesized that female participants would not have a higher level of resilience as compared to male participants. Data was collected using Child Exposure to Community Violence Scale (CECV), and Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA). The findings revealed that male participants had a lower mean (8.19) as compared to female participants (13.82). The study used secondary data analysis which may not have captured the respondents' experiences accurately, and the sample comprised university students. The current study used primary data collection methods on a sample of secondary school students to establish whether there are gender differences in academic resilience.

Contrary to these findings, Mohr [14] carried out a study on the development of a comprehensive measure of protective factors, and found no gender differences in resilience.

The sample comprised 301 students from Western United States University 163 (54.2%) females and 138 (45.8%) males with an average age of 18.69 years (SD = 1.45). The study hypothesized that whether or not a child will display resilience is influenced by the gender of the child. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine gender differences in resilience. The findings indicated that no significant differences were found. The current study aimed at validating these findings, on a sample of secondary school students from Kiambu County, Kenya.

In tandem with these findings, Tefera and Mulatie [15] did not establish any gender differences in resilience. The researchers carried out a study on risks, protection factors and resilience among orphan and vulnerable children in Ethiopia. The sample comprised 182 Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC). Data was collected using a self-report questionnaire. An independent t-test was used to test gender differences in resilience. It was observed that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female OVC respondents ( $t = 0.112, p < .05$ ). The findings further revealed that the mean resilience score of male and female participants was almost equal, that is, 40.05 for males and 40.21 for females. The current study examined whether resilience processes (external and internal protective factors) were the same for male and female among secondary school students.

The findings of Saverimuthu [16] indicated no significant gender differences in resilience. The researcher examined resilience factors in school youth through gender and cultural lenses. The sample comprised 30 senior level elementary students (17 male, and 13 female). Data was collected using the Child and Youth Resilience Measure CYRM- 28 by Ungar and Liebenberg. It is a self-report measure comprising 28 items which explores resilience in youths aged between 12-23 years. The CYRM-28 has 3 sub-scales pertaining to the individual, caregiver and context. The three taken together yield a global resilience score. A one-way analysis of variance was used to

determine if there were any significant differences in resilience scores between genders. The findings indicated that there were no significant differences in global resilience scores ( $F(1, 28) = .00, p > .05$ ) between genders. Saverimuthu noted that the CYRM - 28 full scale (28 items;  $\alpha = .80$ ) showed good internal reliability whereas the individual subscale (11 items;  $\alpha = .51$ ), caregiver subscale (7 items;  $\alpha = .58$ ), and context subscale (10 items;  $\alpha = .60$ ) showed poor internal reliability. The current study was conducted in order to address this limitation of the low internal consistency reliability scores, and the insufficient sample size (30 students).

Literature therefore has differing results regarding gender differences in resilience. Against this backdrop of inconsistencies in empirical research into gender differences in resilience, the present study explored this relationship further.

### Method

The study was an ex-post facto research, and employed a descriptive correlation design to investigate gender differences in academic resilience.

### Participants

The study constituted 390 from three students (198 boys, 192 girls) from ten Sub-County schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. The participant's age ranged from 15-24 years ( $M=17; SD= 1.31$ ).

### Measures

A questionnaire comprising of two distinct sections was used to collect data. Section (a) of the questionnaire comprised a demographic data form that was used to solicit specific demographic information pertaining to gender, age, and name of school. Section (b) comprised of - the California Healthy Kids Survey- (Module B) which was used to collect data on academic resilience. In a large scale survey of school children ( $N= 10,000$ ) by Schnoebelen the CHKS-B reported a psychometrically sound measure of resilience. In addition, a study by Hanson and Kim [17] on the psychometric properties of the CHKS-B found that it provides balanced coverage of internal and external protective factors that make up academic resilience, with moderate construct validity.

They further examined the CHKS item bias and verified that the factor structure of the scales held across racial-ethnic groups. Furlong et al. in a study on developing norms for the Californian scale provided normative data on the CHKS based on responses of 141,000 California students. The researchers utilized Hanson and Kim's factor structure to determine that the variance attributable to grade (0.3%), ethnicity (0.8%), and gender (2.3%) were small. Research by WestEd [18] on factor analytic studies of the CHKS-B. WestEd used data from spring 2001 for grades 7, 9, and 11 ( $n = 60,000$ ), and found that the internal and external resiliency scales had high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$  and  $.92$ , respectively), and

alphas for the asset scales ranged from .59 to .90. The CHKS-B has been found to yield reliable data when used with non-American samples. A study among Turkish adolescent students reported sufficient Cronbach's Alphas for the subscales ranging 0.55 to 0.85 [ ]. In this study the scale yielded data that was deemed to be sufficiently reliable (Table 1). Data on academic achievement was acquired from the school performance records.

**Procedure**

The instrument was pretested on a group of 30 students (15 boys and 15 girls) to ascertain its reliability. Using random sampling, participants were selected from 10 secondary schools in Kiambu County. Student participation was solicited in line with research ethics and they were duly briefed on the aims of the study. Written and informed consent was obtained from the students prior to questionnaire administration. Confidentiality of research data was assured by asking the participants to furnish information anonymously. The researcher gave the participants directions on how to fill the questionnaire both verbally and in writing. The questionnaire was administered during the school day and in the classroom setting in order to maximize participation by the respondents. The participants took 30-40 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher for analysis. Thereafter, form three class teachers were requested to provide academic achievement records, based on the participants' scores in the end of term one examination, 2014.

The collected data was cleaned and coded for statistical analysis. An independent samples t-test was computed to establish whether there were gender differences in academic resilience.

**Results**

The reliability coefficients of the CHKS- Module B as established in the pilot phase of the study are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Cronbach's Alpha Reliabilities for the CHKS- Module B.

Variable	Items	α
External Factors		
Caring Relationships	12	.93
High Expectations	12	.91
Meaningful Participation	9	.88
Internal Factors		
Social Competence	9	.90
Autonomy and Sense of Self	6	.89
Sense of Meaning and Purpose	3	.71
Overall	56	.87

**Description of Gender Differences in Academic Resilience**

The participants' academic resilience scores were analyzed to find the mean and standard deviation. Girls had a higher mean (M= 192.02, Sd=20.18) than boys (M = 188.2, Sd=19.91). A cross-tabulation of participants' levels of academic resilience by gender is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Gender Differences based on Levels of Academic Resilience<sup>a</sup>.

LACR	Sex		
	Female	Male	Total
Low	6 (1.5)	13 (3.3)	19 (4.9)
Moderate	107 (27.4)	108 (27.7)	215 (55.1)
High	79 (20.3)	77 (19.7)	156 (40.0)
Total	192 (49.2)	198 (50.8)	390 (100.0)

**Note:** LACR = level of academic resilience.

<sup>a</sup>percentages given in parentheses.

The findings in Table 4 indicate that about twice as many males (3.3 %) as females (1.5%) had a low level of academic resilience. In the moderate category, there were an almost equal number of males and females (females, 27.4 %, Males, 27.7%). There were more females with high level of academic resilience (20.3%) compared to males (19.97%).

In addition, a cross-tabulation of participant's level of academic achievement by sex was done and the results were as presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Sex of the Respondent and Level of Academic Achievement.

LACR	Sex		
	Female	Male	Total
Low	30(7.7)	35(9.0)	65(16.7)
Moderate	115(29.5)	136(34.9)	251(64.4)
High	47(12.1)	27(6.9)	74(19.0)
Total	192(49.2)	198(50.8)	390(100.0)

**Note:** N = 390. LAA = Level of Academic Achievement

As presented in Table 5, there were more males than females with low and moderate academic achievement. However, more females had higher academic achievement than males.

As presented in Table 5, there were more males than females with low and moderate academic achievement. However, more females had higher academic achievement than males.

The null hypothesis tested was:

H01: There are no significant mean differences in academic resilience given students' gender.

To test this hypothesis, the data was subjected to an independent samples t-test. A significant difference between

the mean academic resilience scores for girls ( $M = 192.02$ ,  $Sd = 20.18$ ) and boys ( $M = 188.2$ ,  $Sd = 19.91$ ) was established ( $t = 1.97$ ,  $df = 388$ ,  $p = .05$ ). The difference was in favour of girls. The null hypothesis was thus rejected.

### Discussion

From the findings of this study, it can be observed that there are gender differences in academic resilience. The girls were found to be more academically resilient compared to the boys.

This study corroborated prior research that documented gender differences in academic resilience. Sun and Stewart [19] examined age and gender effects on resilience in children and adolescents using a cross-sectional study. Surveys were administered to 1109 male and 1163 female students ( $N = 2492$ ) in 2004. Female students were found to have higher resilience scores than boys. These findings are further supported by Thornton [20] in a study of resiliency of American Indian High School students. The study included 42 males (38.5%) and 67 females (61.5%).

It was observed that the female students scored significantly higher than male students on all measures of resilience. In line with these findings are the results of a study by Lees [3] that sought to determine the relationship between resilience and the academic achievement of at-risk students in the Upward Bound Program in Georgia. The sample comprised 91 students. The findings indicated a positive, significant relationship between the sex of the respondents and resilience which was noted as ( $r(89) = .24$ ,  $p < .05$  level). It was further observed that the females in the study were more resilient than the males and had a slightly higher overall mean resilience score of 3.62 over the males who had an overall score of 3.44. This is also in tandem with the findings of Rationan and Phlainoi [21] who examined the process of resilience promotion for secondary school students in urban slums in Bangkok. The sample comprised 306 secondary school students. An analysis of the results by gender found that females showed a significantly higher level of resilience than males. This was further similar to the findings of Kyuper [22] which indicated that females tend to behave more resiliently than their male counterparts.

Irungu and Nyagah [23] also agree with the current study findings. They undertook a study on the determinants of academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, in public Secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. The sample comprised 260 teachers, 246 students, 36 principals and the County Director of Education (CDE). The findings revealed that a lot of emphasis has been placed on the girl child at the expense of the boy child. This negligence has exposed the boy child to drug and substance abuse and adverse peer influence.

These findings further concur with those of Kenyan researchers such as Ogotu [24]. The study explored the impact

of resiliency and protective factors in academic achievement among primary school pupils from refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya using an ex post facto study design. The sample comprised 188 pupils (132 males and 56 females) and 22 teachers selected from standard five to eight classes in 22 refugee primary schools. The results indicated that the mean resiliency score of male and female respondents differed significantly (44.91 for male and 46.95 for females). The females were therefore observed to have a higher mean resiliency score compared to the males.

These findings however are inconsistent with those of Abukari [25]. The sample comprised 276 students in Ghana. Bivariate analyses revealed gender differences in academic resilience in favour of males. The findings of the current study also differed with those of Sarwar et al. [26]. Who investigated the relationship between resilience and academic achievement of secondary level students of Gujranwala, Pakistan? The sample consisted of 127 secondary students, including 52 boys' and 75 girls. Sarwar et al. [26] indicated that female and male students at the secondary level differ in their resilience, favoring male students. Gross [27] on a sample of 167 low-income fifth through eighth grade urban African American adolescents (53% females and 47% males) observed that gender was not associated with academic resilience and achievement. Previous research by Connor and Davidson found no significant difference in the resilience scores of males and females.

Khalaf [28] carried out a study in Egypt, with a sample of 57 male and 43 female participants. A statistically significant difference was found among males and females in academic resilience, in favor of males, and in contrast to the findings of the present study.

The discrepancies in the findings may be accounted for by the fact that each gender has their own strengths and weaknesses in dealing with setbacks. Moreover, as noted by Wisdom [29] there are differing societal expectations for girls and boys. These expectations of gender roles may cause boys and girls to interact differently within the resiliency framework [30-423].

### Conclusion

The study revealed that gender may account for differences in students' academic resilience. Significant gender differences in mean academic resilience scores were found in favor of girls. Girls were found to have higher academic resilience. This could be an indication that girls are more inclined to resilient responses than their male counterparts, therefore, the latter lack characteristics commonly associated with resilient students they need additional levels of support.

It is recommended that appropriate intervention programmes that target the boys should be put in place in order to raise the resilience status of the boys. To acquire parity with girls' academic resilience, the boys may require approaches that optimize the links between their academic resilience and their

academic functioning. This will help them overcome the barriers that impede their academic resilience.

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