

Educational Opportunities for Women and Girls in Rural Papua New Guinea: A Case Study of Waromo Village, Sandaun Province

Celestine Ove

Abstract

Universal Primary Education has been a recent addition to the agenda of casual conversations and public discussions in Papua New Guinea. For a developing country like PNG, with deteriorating rural infrastructure, lack of basic education and health services, high infant and maternity death rates, high illiteracy levels, low life expectancy and little or no access to goods and other services, universal education needs to be given high priority. Women are the most disadvantaged group in this nation that is deeply intertwined in its culture and traditional practices. The traditional mentality that women are inferior is still foiling attempts to promote gender equality in PNG. Marginalized to the extent that they are often denied basic education, women and girls are missing out on basic education that should qualify them for formal employment opportunities that will enhance all aspects of life. This paper is based on research that investigates whether the importance of equal educational opportunities for women and girls in a rural society in PNG is understood and whether there is a transition away from the traditional belief that women and girls should not be educated.

The research is based on a week long participant observation and unstructured interviews in the community of Waromo village, Sandaun province. It also takes into consideration the views of primary and high school head teachers, church leaders and the Ward Councillor of Waromo village. Education is a vital tool for development and women and girls' advancement. Therefore it is important to study whether there is equal opportunity that guarantees Universal Primary Education for all in a rural society.

Key words: research methods, developing countries, higher education, de-westernize

Introduction

The PNG government has pledged its full support to accelerating girls' education in the country, with the realization that its failure to do so will result in girls and women being illiterate, unemployed, oppressed and disadvantaged physically and mentally. Efforts to enhance educational opportunities for all, especially in rural PNG have been hindered by financial constraints, but more so by cultural views that women and girls should not receive equal access to services like education.

Flaherty (1998) notes that education offers advantages for women themselves, and through them for their families and society. It is a major means of freeing women from poverty and oppression and raising socio-economic standards. She adds that though exceptional women have succeeded in times of change in Papua New Guinea, the majority of women are seriously disadvantaged in comparison with men. The complexity of the contemporary problem in Papua New Guinea has its roots in women's social and political role in traditional times and the effects of formal education and change on women in Melanesia, particularly during the later decades of colonial administration. Kidu (2006) adds that the Department of Education has been promoting girls' education through a UNICEF assisted project called Accelerating Girls' Education (AGE). But parents also need to be involved in educating their daughters and giving them equal opportunities to develop their talents and potential.

This research looks at whether or not parents and the community in a rural setting in PNG allow for their women and girls to be educated. It also investigates if there is a transition in the traditional view that girls and women should not be given equal educational opportunities as boys and men in rural Papua New Guinea. It began with the following two hypotheses:

- Girls and women are still not given as many educational opportunities as boys and men in rural Papua New Guinea
- Unequal educational opportunities for women and girls indicate that they are not recognized as equal partners in development.

Papua New Guinea

Over 80% of the population are rural based subsistence farmers who constitute a large portion of the informal sector, although the rapid monetisation of the economy has seen the transition to semi-subsistence agriculture where rural household production is not all consumed and the surplus is marketed (Gumoi, 2003: 118) as cited by Kavanamur, et al. (2003). The main concentrations of population are in the rural Highland valleys and in the main towns of Port Moresby, Lae, Rabaul, Madang, Wewak, Goroka and Mount Hagen.

Women are particularly marginalized in PNG where the cultural belief that women are inferior has been deeply embedded into the minds of a society still caught between two worlds – of tradition and of modernity (Rooney, 2003). Topo (2004:166), as cited by Sullivan (2004), writes that more and more females are dropping out of school as they advance from primary to high school and on to university and other tertiary institutions. This is for the simple reason that these institutions emphasize male rather than female advancement. Topo added that a national study of socio-economic indicators shows that the 2002 adult literacy rate for women is 59% compared to 72% for men. Gross enrolment in secondary schools stands at 18% for females and 26% for males (as of 1999).

Turner (1990) stated that the most pervasive image of Papua New Guinea has been that of a nation racked by lawlessness and disorder. The seriousness of such problems has been a worldwide phenomenon and has not been confined to Papua New Guinea, as sensational media reporting sometimes has implied. Papua New Guinea has experienced deteriorating law and order conditions since Independence, but this was to be expected in a country where the colonial emphasis on order was superseded by an orientation to development and the assertion of constitutional rights. Development has been both cause and effect, creating the conditions which have given rise to increased crime and public disorder.

Waromo

Waromo village is located about fifteen kilometres from Vanimo town in the Sandaun province. It is situated along the west coast towards the PNG and Indonesia border. It has an estimated population of 1,500 people. Waromo is the second village from Lido after Vanimo town. Further west is Yako with the last villages being Musu and Wutung on the border.

Located on low coral reefs, Waromo village is surrounded by hills and mountains rising from 5 to 300 metres above sea level. Its vegetation consists mostly of lowland hill forest and secondary growths as a result of timber logging and continuous gardening. The people grow food crops such as bananas, taros and their staple food of sago. The only natural resource within the village is the aquamarine-fishing industry. The Dumo language is commonly spoken by the people along the west coast from Vanimo village to Wutung on the border. The people also speak Pidgin and English. The political administration of Waromo consists of the Ward Member, the Village Recorder and their working committee. The working committee has the following five areas of responsibility: health, education, women, economy and sports.

The ward member makes sure that the village record book is maintained, in consultation with the ward development committee. The committee must then present a five-year development rolling plan for the ward to the local level government. The ward development committee is the principal advisory unit for the ward to the local level government. It determines the needs and problems of the ward in relation to services, programs and infrastructure development. It can also consult with one or more ward development committees in relation to common services, programs and infrastructure.

The villagers have to travel to Lote, about fifteen minutes drive from Waromo, to receive medical attention for minor illnesses. Serious cases are referred to Vanimo General Hospital in town. An aidpost that once serviced the community in the village is now in desperate need of repair. Common illnesses that affect the village include malaria, tuberculosis, skin diseases, minor colds and headaches. The villagers are now at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) with the steady increase of unprotected sexual practices. Teenage pregnancy is on the rise, while drug and alcohol abuse is prevalent.

The literacy level for Waromo stands at more than 50 per cent. There is an elementary school and a primary school in the ward. The elementary school comprises grades one to three with young students being taught the local language of Dumo. Baro Primary School consists of grades four to eight. Eligible students continue on to grade nine at Vanimo High School, Saint Ignatius Secondary School, Aitape High School, Don Bosco Boys Technical Secondary School or Green River High School.

The law and order situation in the community of Waromo is generally quiet, with no major disruptions to peace and order. However, with the establishment of the international highway between PNG and Indonesia and the influx of people from across the border, the situation could eventually change. Appropriate mechanisms need to be in place to prevent activities that cause law and order problems because of this connection.

In terms of commerce and trade, there are several trade stores operating in the village with a liquor outlet. According to the Sandaun Community Development Scheme (CDS) development plan, there is an urgent need for the local people to be assisted to cater for the spin-off benefits from the international highway and the border post.

The location of the village makes it an ideal spot for tourism. Its neighbouring village of Lido is already a home for both local and international surfers. Waromo boasts pristine waterfalls, rivers and luscious vegetation, complimented by long stretches of sandy coastlines. If given the proper resources and training, villagers can develop their environment to cater for a promising future in the tourism industry.

Education in Papua New Guinea

Consistent with Papua New Guinea's constitutional goals, human resource development is a top priority of the national government – in particular, the goal of 'Equity and Participation', which requires all citizens to have equal opportunities to participate in, and benefit from, the development of the country. In recognition of this goal, Papua New Guinea has subscribed to the concept of 'Education for All' (EFA). In subscribing to this declaration, Papua New Guinea has made a commitment to achieving the EFA goals and targets (Accelerating Girls' Education in Papua New Guinea Report, 2003).

The National Education Plan Update 1 (1999) states that the Department of Education's mission, as defined by the National Executive Council, is fivefold:

- to facilitate and promote the integral development of every individual;
- to develop and encourage an education system which satisfies the requirements of Papua New Guinea and its people;
- to establish, preserve, and improve standards of education throughout Papua New Guinea;
- to make benefits of such education available as widely as possible to all of the people; and

- to make education accessible to the poor and physically, mentally and socially handicapped as well as to those who are educationally disadvantaged.

Yet after more than thirty years of education for development in the emerging nations, despite tremendous efforts, crippling loans and increases in numbers of teacher and student enrolments, it became obvious (Jayaweera, 1987:456) that the goal of universal primary education for all countries except for a few was beyond reach. Population growth, depressed economies, the eventual need to improve poor educational standards and growing regional inequities prevented its achievement. Inequalities between rich and poor nations continued (de Santa Ana, 1986:12; Watson, 1988:157) as cited by Flaherty, 1998.

Women and Girls' education in Papua New Guinea

The National Department of Education (NDOE) has always recognized girls' education as an important issue. The establishment of a gender desk to coordinate and support girls' education in schools illustrates NDOE's commitment. In its attempt to support girls' education, the gender desk has developed awareness materials and information to distribute to appropriate divisions and schools. A Gender Policy in Education has been developed and endorsed, and meant to be implemented in all schools. This policy promotes high quality and equitable education that meets the needs of both female and male students. The policy has been developed so that no students in the education system are disadvantaged on the basis of gender (Accelerating Girls' Education in Papua New Guinea Report, 2003).

A comparison of provincial data on infant mortality rates and female adult literacy rates shows a correlation between the two variables. Provinces with high adult female literacy rates have low infant mortality rates. In contrast, provinces with low adult female literacy rates have the high infant mortality rates (Vatnabar, 2003).

Vatnabar (2003) stresses that education is important in bridging the gender inequality gap in Papua New Guinea. She raises the concern that access to education by females is still a problem in PNG and this is attributed to cultural attitudes (Yeoman, 1987). Vatnabar added that in 1980 female enrolment, as a percentage of total enrolment, was 41.4 percent. In 1994 this rose to 44.9 per cent, which is only a 3.5 per cent increase over a fourteen year period (NDOE, 1994). This occurred, even though 736 new schools were opened during that time (Government of Papua New Guinea and UNICEF, 1996).

Flaherty (1998) states that despite genuine efforts and improvements, lofty plans for education from the 1960s to the 1980s were not generally successful as means of developing the poorer countries of the world. In addition, these plans were marked by a general disregard for women's opportunity in education.

Dame Carol Kidu (2006) supports Flaherty's statement by mentioning that international research has clearly demonstrated the importance of educating girls as well as boys. It has shown that the most effective and sustainable poverty reduction strategy for any nation is to educate its girls and women.

Hence, it is imperative that girls and women in a developing country like PNG receive the same level of educational opportunities as boys and men in order to contribute fully to the development of the country through effective participation in all levels of society. Only by being well educated can they improve their health status and enhance economic capacity needed for development.

Rooney (2004) states that there is inequity in terms of access, including a gender bias in favour of male children, with quality education obtainable at a price beyond the means of the bulk of the population. Children in urban areas have access to schools equipped with more and better resources and staffed by more ambitious and able teachers. And yet financial inequities frequently prevent families living in urban settlements from being able to take advantage of the presence of better-equipped schools. Urban schools are able to acquire a disproportionate share of the resources, affecting the most disadvantaged groups within society, the marginalized rural poor, women and settlement dwellers, who are left with access to an inferior education.

Topo (2004) supports Rooney's observation by providing statistics. He mentions that socio-economic indicators show that the 2002 PNG adult literacy rate for women was 59% compared to 72% for men. Topo further stated that the gross enrolment in secondary school stood at 18% for females and 26% for males as of 1999.

Kidu (2006) stresses the importance of equal education opportunities by stating: "We are in a new era for PNG and must also move forward in our attitudes to make sure that girls and boys have equal access to learning opportunities as a life-long experience."

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with members of the Waromo community.

Interviews with village elders

To have an understanding of the traditional beliefs attached with my gender issue, it was important to interview and gather information from the elders of my village. It was important to find out how they felt about education and the 'perceived' implications for their daughters. I wanted to know the reasons, if any, why they chose to keep their daughters out of school and not their sons. It would be interesting to find out if they still hold the same views today (about education).

There were ten questions in Tok Pisin.

1. *Yu bin kisim sampela skul tu o nogat?*
2. *Na yu bin go inap long wanem grade?*
3. *Yu ting wanem long edukesen o skul?*
4. *Yu ting edukesen o skul bilong man or meri?*
5. *Papa bilong yu salim yu go skul tu o nogat?*
6. *Na ol susa bilong yu?*
7. *Wai na ol susa bilong yu ino kisim skul o edukesen?*
8. *Yu bin salim tu ol pikinini bilong yu go long skul*
9. *Hamaspela man o meri yu bin inap long salim igo long skul?*
10. *Wai na yu ino bin salim pikinini meri bilong yu igo long skul?*

Interviews with men

I wanted to find out what men thought about education and whether they thought there are some implications involved in sending their daughters/nieces to school. I wanted to gather views from this particular group about the importance of education for development and also whether there was a significant change/transition in the way they see equal participation of both male and female from the way their fathers and uncles viewed the issue.

1. *Yu pinisim skul long wanem taim?*
2. *Na yu bin go inap long wanem grade?*
3. *Yu ting wanem long edukesen o skul?*
4. *Ol susa bilong yu ibin skul tu o nogat?*
5. *Wai na ol ino kisim skul*
6. *Yu ting wanem long dispela?*
7. *Yu laikim bai pikinini meri bilong yu ikisim gut skul o edukesen bilong wanem tru?*
8. *Yu gat sampla wari olsem pikinini meri bilong yu no nap skul gut o yu igat bilip long em?*
9. *Na yu gat wankain tingting long pikinini man bilong yu o nogat?*
10. *Yu save mekim wanem long helpim pikinini meri bilong yu ikisim gut skul o edukesen?*
11. *Yu laikim bai pikinini man bilong yu ikamap wanem long bihain taim?*
12. *Yu laikim bai pikinini meri bilong yu ikamap wanem long bihain taim?*

Interviews with women

It was important to have an idea of how the women interviewees were treated by their fathers, uncles, grandfathers and relatives in relation to receiving an education. I also wanted to find out about their views on education and what they would like for their daughters and nieces.

1. *Yu pinisim skul long wanem taim?*
2. *Na yu bin go inap long wanem grade?*
3. *Wai na yu bin lusim skul?*
4. *Papa mama na ol uncle na lain bilong yu save helpim yu long lainim gut samting long skul o nogat? Wai?*
5. *Yu ting wanem long edukesen o skul?*
6. *Yu laikim bai pikinini meri bilong yu ikisim gut skul o edukesen tu?*
7. *Yu gat bilip olsem em inap long kamap wokmeri bihain taim na kamapim gutpela sindaun?*

Interviews with women who attended school

I wanted to find out why and how educated women received their schooling and whether there were any implications involved. I wanted to know the benefits of being educated, from their point of view.

1. *Yu pinisim skul long wanem taim?*
2. *Yu bin skul long we?*
3. *Na yu go inap long wanem grade?*
4. *Hau na papa mama bilong yu salim yu igo long skul?*
5. *Yu wok long hamas yia nau?*
6. *Yu igat ol narapela brata susa tu o nogat?*
7. *Ol ibin kisim skul tu o nogat?*
8. *Na ol susa bilong yu olsem wanem?*
9. *Wai na yu ting papa mama bilong yu isalim yu igo skul?*
10. *Edukesen o skul ibenefitim yu olsem wanem tru?*
11. *Yu ting wanem long edukesen?*
12. *Ol pikinini meri bilong yu ikisim skul stap o nogat?*

Interviews with women who had not attended school or withdrew

I wanted to find out why these un-schooled women did not receive education or what their reasons were for withdrawing. I also wanted to find out the effects of their not receiving an education.

1. *Yu pinisim skul long wanem taim tru?*
2. *Na yu stap long wanem grade taim yu lusim skul?*
3. *Wai na yu lusim skul?*
4. *Ol papa mama bilong yu ibin sapotim yu tu o nogat?*
5. *Na ol brata bilong yu, ol kisim skul tu o nogat?*
6. *Sapos yu ibin kisim edukesen o skul, yu ting em bai benefitim yu olsem wanem tru? Laif bilong yu bai olsem wanem nau?*

Interviews with girls who are attending school

I wanted to know what these girls think about education and why their parents sent them to school.

1. *Yu ting wanem stret long edukesen o skul? Em bai helpim yu olsem wanem long bihain taim*
2. *Yu ting papa mama bilong yu isalim yu ikam long skul long wanem?*
3. *Yu ilaik kamap wanem long bihain taim*
4. *Brata bilong yu istap long skul tu o nogat?*
5. *Papa mama bilong yu isave helpim yu tu o nogat?*
6. *Wanem kain ol skul yu ol papa mama i givim long yu long bai yu stap olsem wanem long skul?*

Interviews with girls who are not attending school

I wanted to know why school-aged girls were not in school.

1. *Wai na yu ino stap long skul?*

Interview with a headteacher

I wanted to get comments on the enrolment of both boys and girls at a primary school and what his observations were on the participation of girls in school, their parents' involvement and the number of females being accepted for higher education.

1. Are there more males or females enrolled at this school?
2. Why is this the case?
3. As the headteacher, can you describe the parents' involvement in their daughters' education at this school?
4. Are more females being accepted for high school studies each year?
5. How can you describe general student female participation at this school?
6. What are some reasons parents give for not sending their daughters to school?

Participant Observation

Collecting data by participant observation was done during a Parents and Guardians meeting at the Primary School hall. The researcher was asked to record the minutes for the meeting as the person normally responsible was not present. This provided an excellent opportunity for the researcher to be a participant observer. The occasion was important to establish whether parents, guardians and the community support their children in their education, particularly their daughters. The attendance, participation and comments from the school board members as well as the headteacher were analyzed to determine this.

Education in Waromo

An elderly woman said, "*Bipo mipla save laik kisim save, nau inogat olgeta.*" (We used to have a keen interest in education in the past, but today there is no interest). The researcher was able to draw from this comment and other similar remarks by the elderly of the village that the young of the past had a very high interest in receiving an education or some form of it. One elderly woman expressed that the youth of today show no sense of interest at all in education. She added that this problem was becoming a major concern for everyone in the village community.

Another elderly woman stated that she highly valued education as a way of enhancing all aspects of life. She added that if she had not been forced to leave school, she would be employed and live somewhere in the city. "*Mi bin mekim gut tru long skul tasol ol papamama rausim mi na nau mi stap olsem.*" (I performed very well in school but my parents removed me from classes and today I am like this).

Comments from interviews with other members of the community seem to support the view that the young of Waromo today do not generally have an interest in becoming educated. A young man stated that his younger brother had no interest at all in attending classes at the village primary school. He mentioned that the younger brother never completed grade four and just stays in the village. "*Em (younger brother) les long skul.*" (He does not want to go to

school). The young man explained that his younger brother just gave up on school after their mother passed away. This was also a reason given by a good number of interviewees when asked why they or a member of their family left school. He also mentioned that smoking was another factor that contributed to his brother leaving school. "*Em save lusim skul long smuk go na em lusim skul olgeta.*" (He used to skip classes to smoke but eventually he left school for good). "*Bipo ino pasin blo mipla.*" (We did not have this attitude in the past).

One elderly man commented, "*Planti (young) bai stap long ples. Ol tingting long stadi, ol tingting long man o meri na ol tingting olsem mi mas marit. Nau tingting ino strong long skul o wok.*" (Many of these young people will remain in the village. They do think about their studies but they also think about the opposite sex and then they think about getting married. They eventually lose interest in school or becoming formally employed). This grandfather said that he made sure all his children attended classes as he wanted them to become employed and fend for themselves in the real world. Most of his children are formally employed in the government sector.

One woman commented that in the past, expatriates brought the white men's system whereby there was discipline. Today the educational standard has dropped because of national teachers having lower standards of discipline. She also added that the Education Reform was to be blamed for today's drop in education.

Most of the youth interviewed said that they lacked interest in becoming educated. One young boy mentioned that he enjoyed life in the village hunting or fishing more than being in class.

Another young woman said she left school because of boy/girl relationships.

Another young man stated that he just gave up on school as he had no interest at all and said that he wanted to remain in the village as a subsistence farmer.

Most of the youth who were interviewed also blamed inability to pay school fees.

A young man blamed his father for his lack of motivation. He mentioned that after his mother died, his father remarried. He said that his father now lives with his new wife and does not support him any more.

Peer pressure was also another factor that contributed to these young people leaving school. "*Yu lukim (wanpela meri) em les olgeta long skul, em kam stap raun nating nating wantaim ol liklik frens blo em.*" (You look at one girl. She just gave up on school and is roaming around aimlessly with her little friends). The author concluded that the girl mentioned was influenced by her friends who left school before her and now had no intention of returning to school.

It can be concluded that the young of Waromo today do not generally have an interest in receiving an education. Though they may have been interested in schooling in the past, this has been crippled by the following factors:

- Laziness
- Peer pressure
- Boy/Girl relationships
- Addiction to cigarettes (and other drugs)
- Death in the family
- School fee constraints
- Lack of support from parents
- Ineffective public service
- Education reform

However, the researcher observed that many children do attend school despite the problems. Concerned parents said that they wanted the best for their children's future and were keen on assisting in any way possible. The past situation was summarized by the researcher as 'more conducive' to learning because school fees were not high, as explained by some interviewees, and there were minimal alcohol or drug related problems unlike those faced by the youth of today.

Past and present educational opportunities for women and girls in Waromo

It was found from the interviews with the women of Waromo that there was unequal access to education for women and girls in the past compared to today. Many of the elderly women interviewed mentioned that their parents or the community forced them to leave school. They said that their male colleagues were allowed to pursue their educational journeys.

One elderly woman told of her experience: "*Mi bin skul gut go tasol papamama blong mi prèt olsem mi wanpela meri tasol long klas olsem na ol rausim mi.*" (I was progressing well in school but since I was the only female in class, my parents decided to remove me from school). She mentioned some well-known classmates of her time who were 'bigmen' now and said she used to beat them academically.

Other women shared the same remarks. One woman said she was removed from school because of a simple misunderstanding. She explained that her father never heard her side of the story that resulted in her getting suspended for a year. Though she was only suspended, her father never allowed her to continue. Now that she understands the value of education, she only wishes she could be given another opportunity to complete hers after all these years.

Other women shared a similar experience where a few girls during their time were taken out of school because of an incident concerning a single female. They mentioned that it was unfair on them and said they never wanted to leave school but they had no choice but to obey their parents and the community. Many interviewees mentioned that girls were removed from school because

their parents were afraid that they would get married to men from other provinces and not return to Waromo to care for them. They also feared that these men from other provinces would not pay bride price.

However, fortunate women from Waromo were able to progress on for further studies and become formally employed. Yet these numbers were still minimal.

It was found that the situation has changed significantly today. Many women and girls have equal access to education with men and boys in Waromo. Men said that they have a genuine concern for the education of their wives, daughters and nieces. Many men commented that it was important to have gender equality in all aspects of life, and especially in education. As one man commented, "Education is the backbone. Both sexes need to be educated. Our country needs that. Men alone cannot produce best results. There should be women too in decision making."

Observations on the community of Waromo revealed that many girls were receiving an education. Girls also understood its importance with a few commenting that they need education to become the person they want to become in future. One aspired to become an ambassador; another wanted to become a lawyer, while one wanted to become a pilot. It was very encouraging to see that girls were given an opportunity to make those dreams become reality. One young woman said: "Education brings out the best in life." It can therefore be concluded that some young women and girls of Waromo understand the importance of education and what it can do to their lives for the better.

However, there are some girls and young women in Waromo who are still being denied the right to be educated. One of these young women stated that she was supposed to further her education but due to limited funds, her parents and relatives decided instead for a male relative to continue. She is now in the village but has a very keen interest in pursuing her goals in life. "*Mi lukim ol lain go skul na mi tu laik skul tasol nogat moni.*" (I see students attending school and I also want to attend school but there is no money for school fees). Another observation and additional interviews led to a finding that if a girl was the last born in the family, she was pulled out of school to remain in the house to do chores and take care of the parents if they are old.

The findings of this research show that there is a significant transition in the traditional view that girls and women should not be given equal educational opportunities as boys and men in rural Papua New Guinea.

Comments from senior teachers

According to one primary school headteacher, girls are now favoured more than boys in Waromo. He said that girls tend to dress more presentably with shoes, whereas boys come barefoot to school. "This shows that parents are favouring their daughters more than their sons. Parents are also giving more time to their daughters." He added that the basic needs of girls are met more than the needs

of boys. He commented that the morale of boys was not boosted when they were being ignored. In terms of academic performance, he added that in his five years in the school, he has observed that girls were now participating more than boys and making better progress.

However he highlighted some of the problems that existed. "Parents rely very much on teachers for their children's education." He stressed that parental input into their children's learning would improve it dramatically. However, parents who did not attend Parents and Guardians meetings were demonstrating little concern for their children's education. He mentioned that parents rarely check whether their children are up to date with their homework. Though he understood that many parents are illiterate or have limited literacy skills, he said that they should still ask their children if they had done their homework or the required studies. He added that education for a child was an investment for the future of Papua New Guinea.

The headteacher added that teachers were at times responsible for students not getting a proper education. He mentioned that some teachers were not committed to high standards of professional conduct. He said that drunkenness was a problem affecting some teachers. This resulted in their poor attendance and inconsistent standards of performance. He said that such factors contributed to poor learning by children. He stated that the people of the West-Coast of Vanimo had intelligence but commitment from teachers was needed to develop it. He also mentioned that cultural obligations played a big role in some teachers' performance. "Some teachers take two weeks off to take part in customs like baim het." He added that teachers had to work out their priorities, though he understands that culture is a part of life. "We have to decide between our children or culture," he added.

According to a deputy headteacher, females today stand a better chance of success in school than boys do. Like the headteacher who was interviewed, this deputy headteacher also commented that poor attendance at Parents and Guardians Meetings indicated that parents were not fully supportive of their children's education. He added that many parents did not complete their children's school fees which resulted in students' lack of concentration in class. He also added that parents were always quick to defend their children whenever they committed an offence in school. "There are instances when parents come back and verbally abuse us. When we try to help the child, parents only cover up their own failures." He commented that parents' lack of discipline over their children was a major problem today.

The deputy headteacher stated that, although the old mentality that women and girls should not be educated has changed, the number of females progressing on for further studies was slowly declining. He commented that more awareness should be carried out among the youth in the village to encourage them to succeed. He also agreed that family planning had to be strengthened in marriages in order for parents to space their children so that school fees can be paid for every child.

Conclusion

This study has shown that in Waromo there is a transition in the traditional mentality that women and girls in rural Papua New Guinea should not be given equal educational opportunities as men and boys. This is promising for the future of women and girls in Papua New Guinea, as empowerment is needed for further development. There is a common belief that women and girls should be as well educated as men and boys in a rural society. However, this can be hindered by such problems as shown in this research: school fee constraints, peer pressure, boy/girl relationship problems, lack of parental support and guidance and alcohol/drug abuse. Of all of these, school fees were seen to be the main obstacle to children receiving an education.

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Author

Celestine Ove graduated with a Bachelor of Communication Arts (Journalism) from Divine Word University in February 2007. She is now working with Oil Search Limited in Port Moresby. In June 2007 she spent a two-week internship with the South Pacific Commission in Noumea. This paper was completed as part of her undergraduate research in Gender Issues in PNG.