

Teacher Well-Being in Refugee Camp and Host Communities in Kenya: A Case of Garissa and Turkana Counties - Pilot Study Report



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Study Site: Garissa township and Dadaab refugee camp in Garissa County
Report compiled by African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)

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Executive Summary



community schools.

As part of the Teacher Well-Being Study, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) conducted a pilot in Garissa County, Kenya, to test the functionality, clarity, and feasibility of qualitative and quantitative tools ahead of the main study planned for September 2025. The pilot sought to refine instruments, ensure cultural sensitivity, and strengthen methodological and ethical rigor in capturing the well-being of teachers in refugee and host

Six schools in Dadaab refugee camp and its host community were purposively selected. Eighteen teachers, six heads of institutions, county-level policy actors, and gender-segregated teacher groups participated through surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Locally recruited and trained field assistants played a crucial role in building trust, ensuring linguistic accuracy, and navigating cultural sensitivities.

Key lessons included simplifying language, reducing tool length, improving question flow, incorporating culturally appropriate phrasing, and adjusting scheduling to respect religious practices. Logistical learnings emphasized the need for safe, neutral venues, security-sensitive sampling, and continuous enumerator feedback loops.

The pilot informed major refinements: streamlined survey tools, clarified skip patterns, expanded demographic profiles, gender-responsive FGDs, and inclusion of safety, mental health, and disability considerations. A validation workshop with government and NGO partners further strengthened tools to ensure cultural responsiveness, inclusivity, and policy relevance.

Though geographically limited, the pilot generated critical operational, cultural, and methodological insights. These will ensure that the main Teacher Well-Being Study is robust, ethical, and contextually grounded, producing evidence to inform teacher support programs and education planning across Kenya's refugee and host community schools.

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Introduction

As part of the Teacher Well-Being Study, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) conducted a pilot exercise to test the functionality, clarity, and feasibility of the qualitative and quantitative tools and procedures for data collection. This was undertaken to ensure ethical and methodological rigor, as well as cultural sensitivity before rolling out the main study.

Purpose of the Pilot Study

The main purpose of this pilot study was to test and refine the study tools to ensure clarity, flow, and accurate capture of teacher well-being, generating insights to strengthen the main study, anticipated to begin when schools reopen for the third term in September 2025.

Study Site for the Pilot Study

The pilot was initially planned for both Garissa and Turkana County refugee and host community. However, unrest in Kalobeyei, a settlement in Kakuma (Turkana), linked to tensions over aid cuts, prompted the team to conduct the pilot only in Garissa. In Dadaab Refugee Camp and its surrounding host community, six schools were purposively selected to represent varied contexts for the purpose of testing the study tools: two public and one private in the host community, and two refugee schools and one public school within the camp.



Recruitment and Training of Research Field Assistants

Field assistants were recruited from the local community, prioritizing individuals with prior experience in the Teachwell and FLANA 2025 data collection exercises within refugee and host community settings. The selection criteria emphasized familiarity with SurveyCTO and prior engagement with the refugee community.

Community-driven data collection by local field assistants with a deep understanding of societal dynamics and fluency in the local languages, proved critical in building trust, navigating cultural sensitivities, and ensuring participant trust during interviews.

The recruited assistants underwent training in both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, and the use of tools and procedures. In addition, they received instruction on research ethics and safeguarding protocols to ensure adherence to ethical standards and the protection of all participants. Upon completion of the training, the field assistants were deployed in two groups (Garissa host community and Dadaab refugee camp) to conduct data collection.

Methods of Data Collection

To capture perspectives across different levels in the education ecosystem, data collection targeted both school-level and system-level actors through mixed methods comprising qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Quantitative Approaches

- 1) *Teacher Survey*: A survey was conducted with three teachers per school, i.e., one each from Grades 1, 2, and 3, leading to a total of 18 respondents. The survey covered a range of well-being indicators, including teaching conditions, stress levels, access to professional development, and relationships with students, colleagues, and the community.

Qualitative Approaches

- 1) *Key Informants Interview (KIIs) with Head of Institutions (HoI)*: In each school, we conducted a KII with the HoI to gather school-level insights into teacher support systems, challenges faced, and policies affecting teacher well-being of female, male and teachers with special needs.
- 2) *KIIs with Policy Actors*: KIIs were held with county education officials from Teacher Service Commission (TSC), Ministry of Education (MoE), and Lutheran World Federation (LWF), to understand systemic factors influencing teacher well-being, such as policy implementation, resource allocation, and their relationship with learners, fellow teachers, and the community.
- 3) *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)*: The team facilitated separate FGDs with male teachers in the refugee camp and female teachers in the host community. This encouraged open dialogue on gender-specific experiences of teacher well-being.

Findings from the Pilot Study

Observations on Piloting the Tools

a) Length of Tools

- Quantitative tools contained too many questions, leading to fatigue and reduced concentration. The tool also lacked skips where necessary to facilitate the quick flow of the questions.
- Qualitative tools had overly broad and overlapping questions, which also risk creating participant fatigue.

b) Language Clarity

- Many refugee teachers in the camp were more comfortable using Somali than Kiswahili or English, which affected the clarity and depth of their responses.
- Certain survey terms required simplification to align with teachers' everyday vocabulary, ensuring that concepts were understood as intended.
- Using local data collectors familiar with the local language improved accuracy, translation of tools, and interpretation into Somali. This adaptation ensured that important nuances were not lost.

c) Question Flow

- The flow of questions and sections of both qualitative and quantitative tools was re-arranged to ensure a logical, relatable sequence, prompting a smoother conversation.
- Some questions worked better when re-ordered, to allow teachers to share experiences naturally before moving into more sensitive or complex topics.

d) Cultural Sensitivity

- Religious practices, particularly Friday worship in this dominantly Muslim community in Garissa, affected participant attendance, which meant that data collection would not be scheduled for Fridays.
- Low numbers of female teachers in the camp schools limited the participation of female teachers in FGDs, threatening gender balance in the evidence base. Creating safe, women-friendly spaces and purposively mobilizing female participants, including the use of snowball sampling, will ensure diverse female respondents are recruited and their perspectives are represented.

e) Operational and Logistical Learnings

- Neutral venues such as community halls were more conducive for honest dialogue than school compounds, where teachers feared administrative oversight.
- The strategic choice of venues and mixed-mode data collection (facilitated and self-administered) will enhance data richness.
- The insecurity and inaccessibility of some Garissa sub-counties will require that they are carefully excluded from the sampling frame to protect researchers and participants.
- To ensure accurate and representative sampling during the main study, the team determined it was essential to obtain a comprehensive list of all schools in the two refugee-host counties, along with the number of teachers in each school.
- Enumerator feedback during debrief sessions was invaluable in highlighting confusing or culturally inappropriate phrasing. An iterative refinement process should continue during the main data collection, with enumerators empowered to flag emerging issues for rapid correction.
- Listening to the audio interviews and discussions provided insights into gaps in the data as well as data collection processes, such as probing style, which will inform future processes.

Data Collection Tool Adjustment

The lessons from the pilot study revealed that even well-designed instruments need field refinement before roll out of the fully fledged study. This informed the following adjustments to the tools:

a) Quantitative Survey Adjustments

- Provision was made to take a photo of the signed consent forms to reduce the amount of paperwork taken back to the office for storage
- The background section was enriched with actual names of the sub-counties in Garissa County
- The language was simplified throughout the tool for easier comprehension.
- We added missing response categories to reflect possible responses based on teachers' diverse experiences.
- Skip patterns were corrected to maintain logical flow.
- Redundant items were deleted to reduce fatigue.
- Moved the teacher's unique ID to the backend to speed up data collection time and to avoid duplication by each field assistant.

b) Qualitative Tool Adjustments

- Streamlined repetitive questions and redistributed probes for better conversational flow.
- Introduced a separate demographic annex tool and expanded the fields to capture richer participant profiles, such as years of teaching experience, contract type, subjects taught and TSC registration number (if available)

Lessons for the Main Study

The lessons learnt from the study are highlighted in the table below and are categorized under: Enumerator recruitment and training; Sampling strategy; Cultural adaptation; Tool refinement; Data collection and data processing.

Table 1: Table showing Lessons learned from the study

 Enumerator Recruitment and Training	■ Prioritize locally rooted, culturally competent research assistants ■ Match facilitator and participant genders for sensitive discussions. ■ Provide Somali language training or recruit bilingual enumerators ■ Use model interviews/FGDs audios as part of the training materials to exemplify best practices to the enumerators
 Sampling Strategy	■ Secure verified, up to date list of schools and lists of teachers in the schools before random selection ■ Apply exclusion criteria to exclude insecure areas from the sampling frame to protect both researchers and participants.

 Cultural Adaptation	▪ Translate tools and ensure culturally appropriate phrasing. ▪ Schedule data collection activities outside religious and community events.
 Tool Refinement	▪ Maintain a transparent log of all tool changes with documented rationale ▪ Continue in-field feedback loops for quick adjustments. ▪ Add questions on the stop-work-order by the US and the stress of that on all stakeholders; questions to cater for the category of teachers with special needs; Start with general questions about teachers; then about male/female; then about teachers with special needs. ▪ Define "well-being" and replace the well-being question with what teachers feel stressed about—do this for all the tools. ▪ Revise the FGD for males as a separate tool to generate male experiences of well-being.
Data Collection 	▪ Give participants questions/tools in advance, if possible, to help them prepare better. ▪ Choose quiet and safe spaces, for example, community centers, where participants will not feel administrative censorship, so that they can engage freely. ▪ Use at least two interviewers per FGD to help with flow and complement each other to plug gaps and strengthen the discussion. ▪ Reflect during data collection to ensure each session captures the five key areas of the objectives, status/lived experiences of well-being, factors that influence it, coping strategies, mechanisms to support it and training. This should also be emphasized during enumerator training. ▪ Ask participants to elaborate—use the probes so that the qualitative analysis will be rich; ask one probe at a time—do not bunch them up as this can be confusing for the respondents.
Data Processing 	▪ Recruit transcribers who are competent in both English and Swahili, since the participants tend to switch from one to the other. ▪ Supervisors should listen to pilot audio data to generate more learnings and provide feedback as informed by data and dynamics of interview/discussions to better support main study.

Tool Validation

Upon revising the tools in the aftermath of the pilot as explained in the preceding sections, we conducted a tool validation workshop on 21st August 2021. This event, hosted by APHRC at their campus, brought together both partners-SCI, IRC, RTI, LWF, FAK, as well as government representatives from TSC and MoE for a full-day in-person workshop.

We provided an overview of the study to acclimatize the team with it. We also shared experiences from the field based on the pilot work and how it had informed the revised tools to be shared for review and validation. The team deliberated on the tools, which were further revised based on the following recommendations:

Surveys For Teachers

- Wording with CBC alignment – replaced “pupil/student” with “learner.”
- Type of school – to include private or public school in a) Host community and b) Refugee camp
- Disability questions – extended to cover teachers and family members.
- County of origin – added a question on county of origin.
- Teacher qualification – ask about the highest qualification attained.
- Teacher name – dropped the request for teacher name.
- Teacher load (class or lessons) – capture the number of lessons taught.
- Added question on language of instruction (What learners mostly speak at school, and the language the teacher is conversant with)
- Area of teaching – ask about both actual and preferred teaching area.
- Teacher recruitment, deployment & distance to school – collect details on mode of transport, not just time taken.
- Teacher professional development (TPD) – reordered first to ask if they participated before asking how many.
- Professional affiliations, reporting mechanisms, and decision-making – added item on membership in teacher unions, welfare associations, professional associations; revised phrasing on teacher participation in school management; and included supervision by senior teachers.

In-depth Interviews

Questions added:

- What is the importance of mental health in teacher wellbeing?
- How do you feel about discussing well-being or mental health?
- What motivates you to remain in the teaching profession?
- What factors could have made you leave the teaching profession?
- How can female teachers be supported to improve their well-being?
- How can teachers with disabilities be supported to improve their well-being?
- How safe do you feel within the school? (Probe for experiences of violence or insecurity; safety to and from school; safety within your community) (probe for security concerns/threats)
- Are there instances where you have had to provide for the learners (probe for material, financial support)
- What mechanisms if at all have been provided within the school or community by MoE/TSC to support teacher well-being? (Probe for specific services offered by TSC/MoE)

Probes added

- No 2-Add to the probes on factors that significantly affect teacher well-being: opportunities for leave-e.g. maternity/paternity, compassion promotion/job mobility etc.

Focus Group Discussions for Female Teachers

Questions added

- Add questions on safety both inside the school and in the community.

How safe do you feel within the school? (Probe for experiences of violence or insecurity; safety to and from school; safety within your community) (probe for security concerns/threats)

- Add a question on kinds of support teachers offer [e.g. financial and material support]

Are there instances where you have had to provide for the learners (probe for material, financial support)

- Add a question on support mechanism for teachers from the MoE/TSC-at county level

What mechanisms if at all have been provided within the school or community by MoE/TSC to support teacher well-being? (Probe for specific services offered by TSC/MoE)

Probes added:

- No 2-Add to the probes on factors that significantly affect teacher well-being: opportunities for leave-e.g. maternity/paternity, compassion, promotion/job mobility etc.

Focus Group Discussions for Male Teachers

- Develop a separate tool for male teachers
- The tool should generate evidence related to male teachers (rather than female teachers)
- The probe should consider societal male teacher experiences

Key Informant Interviews for Policy Makers

Questions added

- Questions should consider the difference between refugee and host community teachers
- Add questions on safety both inside and outside school.
What mechanisms are available to ensure the safety of teachers and learners in schools (probe for mechanisms to prevent/address violence and insecurity, including safeguarding and SGBV concerns)

Probed added

- No. 2 Add probe on *citizen status-national/refugee* to the question on the status of well-being among teachers.
- No. 4 Male issues to be included among the probes on gender-specific challenges among teachers
Safe spaces for female/male, financial and material provision, protection

Key Informant Interviews for Heads of Institutions

- Q5 was removed and the suggestion made that the question be treated as vignettes and a few teachers can be asked.

- Q8 was reworded to read “*How do your teachers identify signs of mental health issues [in students? In other teachers and in themselves?*”

All qualitative tools

Demographic information to be added as follows [this applies for all tools including the survey]:

- Indicate whether Kenyan national or refugee or refugee born in Kenya
- TSC registration status
- Type of employment—volunteer, contract, permanent
- Where education was attained
- Length of teaching experience in the camps/host communities
- Replace age range with date of birth
- Are you pursuing any further education
- Consider adding male, female as well as teachers with special needs as a category
- Enhance the presentation of tools through consistency in formatting, punctuation, spacing and alignment of bullet points.
- Questions to add
 - A question on issues of safeguarding. SGBV and mechanisms to support it
E.g. What mechanisms have been put in place to address GBV for teachers and learners within school and the community level? (probe for procedures for reporting and referral, prevention, awareness).
- Probes to add:
 - What is the general well-being of teachers in your school? *Probe: What causes stress for teachers in the school? How is it different for male teachers (e.g. duties/responsibilities, decision-making/leadership, opportunities, challenges).*

The final tools were agreed upon based on revisions informed by both lessons from the pilot as well as reviews conducted by the key stakeholders during the validation workshop. These processes strengthened the research tools, making them more culturally responsive, concise, inclusive, ethically rigorous and methodologically sound.

Road Map to Data Collection, Analysis and Knowledge Translation

At the Validation Workshop, we also presented a roadmap to the data collection scheduled for September 2025 highlighting the activities, timelines, and deliverables of the Teacher Well-Being Study.

Table 2: Road map to data collection, analysis, and knowledge translation

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities
1. Planning	Mar – Aug 2025	- Finalize study protocol and data collection tools (survey, IDIs, KIs, FGDs) - Submit protocol to internal IRBs (APHRC, SCI) and external ethical committees (Daystar University, NACOSTI) - Pilot and revise the tools - Develop and publish learning output (blog) on piloting a tool - Hold a tool validation workshop with key stakeholders and revise the tools - Recruit and then train enumerators/field data collection team
2. Data Collection	Sept – Oct 2025	- Desk review - Quantitative surveys with teachers - Qualitative interviews-IDIs, KIs, and FGDs with teachers, head teachers and policy actors
3. Data Analysis	Nov– Dec 2025	- Quantitative data analysis (descriptive analysis, bivariate & subgroup comparisons & multivariate economic modelling) - Qualitative data analysis (transcription, coding, thematic analysis)
4. Report Writing and Validation	Jan-Feb 2025	- Write the technical report - Share drafts with partners for review and input - Convene workshop with relevant stakeholder to validate the report
5. Knowledge Translation	Feb-Mar 2026	- Research and learning products (policy brief, blog, op-ed, factsheet, journal article) - Conference presentation - Learn shop/webinar with stakeholders (MoE, TSC, NGOs, county education officials)

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Conclusion

Although geographically limited to Garissa, the pilot generated valuable operational, cultural, and methodological insights. It highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity, flexible field strategies, and careful tool refinement in conducting high-quality, actionable research in fragile, refugee-hosting contexts.

By applying these lessons, the main Teacher Well-Being Study will be culturally responsive, ethically rigorous, operationally feasible, and methodologically robust, comprising valid, reliable, as well as credible and trustworthy findings. This will ensure the resulting evidence is relevant for policy, shaping teacher support programs, and guiding education planning and development across Kenya's refugee and host community schools.